

I'appel du vide

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I'appel du vide

by [angelbeachcat](#)

Summary

In a desperate attempt to reconcile the relationship between himself, his parents, and God, George agrees to attend a faith-based residential program for misguided youth. There, he is made to share a room with Dream; troubled, enigmatic, and supposedly dangerous.

Notes

Dream is 18
George is 19

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

firecracker

Chapter Summary

Even the way the horses chew
scares him. When their huge hooves
strike down in their stalls
he shies away, in danger
of backing into tools or machines.

- T. Alan Broughton, Fear

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George doesn't belong here.

He tells it to himself over and over as he steps out of the car and walks up the driveway of his new home for the next three months. He curses himself, for not being careful enough, and then curses himself again for being sorry about the wrong things. He trudges behind his mother, gripping the straps of his backpack as tight as he can. Only when he's nearly at the foot of the building does he dare look up at it.

Jericho House for Misguided Youth in brass letters over the top of the doorway. The building looks innocent enough; half-timbered walls and shuttered windows, vacant planting beds that George is sure host an array of flowers that are well tended to in the warmer seasons. The problem is that George doesn't want to be here, even though he is sure he deserves it. His heart clenches painfully in his chest at the thought, and it feels like an admission of guilt.

His mother says something to the woman at the door in a hushed voice, before turning to him and offering a half-hearted smile. It's more kindness than he deserves, George knows it, and he can feel tears threatening to glaze over his eyes and spill onto his cheeks.

He chokes them back as his mom places a hand on his shoulder, tells him to "*be good, George*" even though he's always been, and walks out like it's nothing.

"George," the woman at the door finally greets him with a polite smile. "Welcome."

George averts his gaze to the floor, shame washing over him. "Thank you, miss."

She must think the worst of him, expect him to lash out and get angry, but George plans to do nothing but be compliant. *I'm not like them*, George wants to say as his eyes wander over to the long hallway behind the desk. He keeps quiet instead.

"I am Sister Catherine," she says, extending a hand for George to shake.

She has honey-coloured eyes and chestnut brown hair, a cross that looks just like the one George wears hanging from her neck. She doesn't look much older than him either, which makes this interaction all the more humiliating. He chides himself for his attitude, because it's not a competition, and it's not her fault that George has managed to land himself here.

“Pleasure to meet you,” George tries, shaking her hand as softly as he can. “I’m here for— I didn’t —”

“It’s alright,” she responds, smiling again in the same soft way. “I understand.”

“I came here to get better,” George continues, voice shaking. “I’m not here to be a problem.”

He needs her to know, needs someone to understand that what he did was a one-off, and he wouldn’t ever dare to make that kind of mistake ever again. His own mother hadn’t believed him, so he doesn’t understand why he thinks that a complete stranger would, but it doesn’t deter him from trying.

“I know,” she soothes. “I believe you, George. But you are not here for your family, or even for God.”

She pauses before leaning closer, almost as if she can see right through him. “Because God loves you, George, and He forgives you. You are here to learn to forgive yourself.”

That makes sense. George swallows hard before he nods three times. Sister Catherine pulls away and motions him towards the long hall. They walk down into an empty common room.

“You will be joining a six month cohort,” she starts. “They’ve already been here for three months already and are acquainted with each other, but I’m sure you’ll find your place in no time.”

The reality of the situation begins to set in. George will be here for three long months. He’ll be spending Christmas away from his family, won’t return back to them until Spring. He’s never been away from home for more than a single night.

“We recommended to your family that you wait for the Spring session, but they really wanted you here as soon as they could,” Sister Catherine laughs like it’s supposed to be a lighthearted joke, but it feels more like a punch in the gut.

She leads him into another hallway, and tells him that this is where the dormitories are for most of the boys.

“Since you’ve arrived late, George,” she starts, before hesitating for a moment. “We’ve had to pair you with the individual in the room in the attic.”

George nods, lips pressing together tightly.

Sister Catherine hesitates, like there is something she would like to say but isn’t supposed to. “It’s a very nice room, more spacious than the ones down here. And we spoke to your mother, and she says that you— you being led astray was something they did not expect to see.”

Shame claws around inside of his chest again, and George closes his eyes as the guilt bites at the inside of his throat.

“No no,” Sister Catherine rushes to say. “It’s not— it’s a compliment, George. It’s alright. We’ve all given in to temptation, it’s just a matter of remedying it.”

George nods, hopes that she moves on from the topic soon.

“The boy that will be living with you, Dream, he’s been here for a couple years, and he tends to be a little— he’s a little aggressive,” she starts. “But he won’t do anything to you. If he gives you trouble, you let me know, okay?”

George knows he shouldn't be judgmental before he meets this person, but there is something incredibly disheartening about getting a warning about the person he will be living with. It feels like a death sentence before his stay has even properly begun.

He's left alone to unpack the few contents of his backpack. Jericho allows for very little to be bought in. All that he's been allowed is his father's Bible and a handful of taffy. He's been instructed to put away his personal clothes as well, instead to change into the uniform laid out on what he assumes is his bed. He holds up the shirt and frowns. It looks a little too big for him.

The door opens.

"Why the fuck are you touching my stuff?"

George jumps back in alarm, dropping clothing back onto the bed and stepping away, both hands in the air. "I'm sorry!"

The boy standing at the door kicks off his shoes in a manner that is unnecessarily aggressive, before making his way over to George. In a moment of panic, George steps backwards, appearing visibly terrified, he's sure. They haven't told him what his roommate has done to get sent here, but he has an irrational fear that he somehow *knows*.

"I didn't mean to, I promise," George stutters out. "I just thought— both sides of the room looked the same, except this side had the uniform, so I thought that it was mine—"

"Your name," the boy— *Dream*, this must be, interrupts him. "You're George, correct?"

George nods, swallowing hard. He thought Sister Catherine was very nice when he first met him, but now he feels as though she and everyone else in this building must want him dead. Dream is half a foot taller than him and looks easily stronger, and if he's as prone to aggression as Sister Catherine says he is, then George is as good as dead now.

"I didn't mean to touch your stuff," he starts again.

Dream raises an eyebrow before laughing shortly. "You didn't. I'm just messing with you."

George tries his best not to audibly exhale as relief floods through his system.

"I won't be in your way," George starts. "I'll be up before you are, in bed before you are. You'll barely have to deal with me."

Dream looks as though he's lost interest in him already, steps forward towards George's bed to see what he has bought from home. When his eyes land on the Bible, and then travel to where the cross hangs low off George's neck, he lets out another audible scoff. "Oh."

George swallows hard, again. "Hm?"

"You're one of those," Dream starts, motioning towards his bed. "You came here for fun?"

No. George is here as a punishment.

It's not a punishment, George reminds himself, because he could have chosen to not attend. Everyone here could have chosen not to attend, including Dream. Still, George thinks it would be a bad idea to lie on his first day here, so he shakes his head.

"I'm here to repent."

Dream looks surprised at this new information, and takes it as an invitation to sit down on George's bed.

"I didn't expect that," Dream says, shrugging before looking down at his nails.

It's a painful reminder.

Nobody did.

"I don't—I'm trying to be better," George offers.

He expects there to be some sort of solidarity in that. He's not sure what kind of difficult Dream is supposed to be, but he doesn't want to chance finding out by being on the receiving end of his anger.

Instead Dream scoffs again. "Sure you are."

"I am," George insists, reaching out to take the uniform back into his arms. "I wasn't—I didn't *want* to come here—"

"Nobody does," Dream cuts him off, bored tone.

"I didn't *mean* to come here," George corrects himself. "I'm going to fix myself."

He isn't quite sure what Dream means by *nobody does*. There are other rehabilitation centers now, ones that don't have crosses on the walls and stained glass chapels. Ending up here isn't a mistake. It's a chance at forgiveness.

"Yeah?" Dream asks, standing back up to tower over George.

George crosses his arms over his chest defensively. "Yeah."

This is some sort of test, it has to be. They've given Dream some sort of script for when he comes in here, to see how easily George's determination can be shaken. Dream laughs at him, pats him on the shoulder in a way that's both encouraging and condescending at the same time, before he moves to his side of the room again.

George feels bold for a moment. "Why are *you* here?"

Dream's expression turns grim for a brief moment, and George feels sick self satisfaction curl up in his gut for a brief moment. Then he immediately feels bad, because it isn't right, and just because Dream was trying to instigate a fight doesn't mean George should be playing along.

"I fought someone," Dream announces as the nonchalance melts back in his features as he leans back. "Did they already give you the tour?"

George feels the blood in his veins run cold.

"Yes," George answers quietly.

It can't be good news for George to be here, not with him.

Dream leaves him alone for a little while after that. George walks over to the bathroom and changes into the gray loose-fitted pants and white collared shirt with a J embroidered over the sleeve. He splashes his face with water, attempts to calm down, and then slicks his hair back.

He can do this. He can.

This doesn't have to be bad. Sure, he'd only found out he was being whisked away here the night before, and sure, his father hadn't looked him in the eyes for three days, but he can get through this. After he's finished here, he's off to the seminary to fulfill his true purpose, to help people that were actually misguided. He's choosing to be here, he reminds himself. He's nineteen. He could leave if he wanted to. Jericho was typically reserved for troubled youth under twenty that would rather take a religious path of reform instead of the government programs, but individuals could opt in if they felt they needed the guidance and were willing to pay the enrollment fee.

And George's parents *love* him, he reminds himself, or else they wouldn't have bothered to send him here.

When he exits, Dream turns to look at him, then exhales heavily through his nose. This makes George angry.

"I don't understand your problem with me," George starts.

"I don't have one," Dream responds easily. "I told you why I'm here. Why are *you* here?"

George doesn't speak. Dream surprisingly, doesn't look offended.

"That's good," he starts. "When you go out there and meet everyone, don't make the same stupid mistakes you made here."

He sits up, leg bouncing up and down the moment it hits the floor. "Don't ask people why they're here, or you'll get socked in the head. Don't start shaking when people speak to you, and maybe you can maintain a little bit of a reputation, enough to keep you off some assholes' radars."

"You're making this sound like prison," George starts, running a hand through his hair. "It's not—we're here for God—"

"George," Dream cuts him off. "If you think the people that are here because they broke the law are here for *God*, you're in for a rude awakening."

It can't be like what Dream is describing. His mother told him that this was one of the best religious reform retreats in the state. The people there have committed minor offenses, things that could be remedied with a loving hand to guide them. And George had never hurt anyone other than himself, so that has to count for something. Dream is trying to scare him, he's sure of it.

"It's just people that have committed small crimes," George argues back. "There are no violent criminals here."

The silence is loud as George realizes what he's said, but Dream doesn't look surprised by his statement. He should apologize. He doesn't.

"Why are you helping me?" George asks, suspicious all of a sudden, and he immediately hates himself for it.

He isn't this standoffish. He *isn't*. He's not this person he's presenting himself as, judgmental and distrusting. His hands instinctively fly to the cross hanging from his neck. Dream notices, but doesn't say anything in regards to that.

"Because you're going to get yourself in trouble," Dream responds. "I can tell by just looking at you. And I don't want you to pull me into your mess once you do."

Dream thinks he can't handle himself. It makes him angry for a moment, before he remembers that he's here to repent, and anger won't assist that process by any means. If this place is as terrifying as Dream is making it out to be, then it's in George's best interests to be on his good side.

"I won't," George reaffirms, and he inhales, exhales, and reminds himself that *he isn't like this*. "I'm sorry for my standoffishness. Thank you for your advice."

Dream scoffs again, but there's a faint smile on his lips, as if he's amused.

"I don't want to be hostile with you," George starts. "I want to be friends."

The hostile nature of Dream's tone returns as he crosses his arms over his chest. "I'm not here to make friends."

George can't help but feel dismayed at that, but he supposes he doesn't blame him. "Alright."

He walks over to his bed and places the Bible on his bedside table, feeling Dream's eyes watching over him curiously. He can't help but feel nervous. He's sure that Dream has his reasons for being guarded, he's been here longer than George has.

"If you would like," George starts. "I would love to have you show me around the outside. I haven't seen it yet."

The silence is suffocating, but before George can take it back, Dream speaks.

"Fine," Dream says.

George can make it through this, he can. He's here to learn how to properly repent, and he'll return back home a changed man. Maybe then, his mother won't look like she's going to burst into tears at the sight of him, and his father will look him in the eye.

Dream stands up and stretches, the fabric of his uniform tight around his chest for a moment before he motions for George to follow. He points out the courtyard, where they're allowed to be during free time and after meals. He tells George about how the brothers only come out during prayer times, and are expected not to be spoken to after that. When they return back to their room, Sister Catherine is waiting outside for them.

"I'll give you the rest of the tour, George," she starts, but Dream interrupts her.

"I already gave it to him."

Dream walks back into their room and closes the door, leaving George alone with her.

"I'm sorry," he apologizes. "I didn't know you were going to give it to me."

Sister Catherine waves him off, but informs him that he should let one of the sisters know before he wanders off, in case of an emergency. He feels like a child as he apologizes again. She hands him a booklet of pages stapled together, tells him that they have his schedule as well as the prayers he's meant to know by heart at the beginning of next week.

"You'll find that we are quite forgiving here," she tells him matter of factly. "Dream is— I don't mean to speak ill of him, but he has a tendency to exaggerate how strict the conditions are here."

George keeps quiet.

"We don't normally share this information," Sister Catherine further justifies. "But seeing as

Dream was brought here for a more serious offense than the rest of our attendants, I think it is only fair I inform you.”

He’s sure there is truth to what Sister Catherine is saying. She informs him that he is not expected to attend the group prayer before dinner, but that she’s hoping to introduce him before they eat. He thanks her and promises to come down to the kitchens by six at the latest. When he enters back into the room, Dream is staring at him with an expression that George can’t decipher.

He wants to ask him more. Before he can, Dream stands and excuses himself for group activities. He’s more gentle with the door this time round, opting to close it instead of slamming it. George listens for the click of the lock before he exhales.

Chapter End Notes

let me know your thoughts so far in exchange i will mail u a slice of pie

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doe-eyes

Chapter Summary

The threadbare lying, the insufferable longing,
the inimitable lack of touching, the undoing
undone.

- Andrea Hollander, Betrayal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dinner is relatively uneventful. George speaks with some of the other boys, who seem nice despite the warning he had received earlier from Dream. He chalked it up to a scare tactic, but he can't imagine why he would risk forging bad blood between the two of them, seeing they're going to be sharing a room for the next three months.

And of course Dream sees this place as a prison, seeing that he's been here much longer than everyone else. He tells himself to drop the topic in favour of peace.

He forgets about his decision when he returns from the showers to find Dream picking at one of the tiles on the floor by his bed. Perhaps it's the exhaustion from traveling all day, because George doesn't consider himself particularly confrontational, but it makes him feel irritated.

"What are you doing?"

Dream jolts in surprise at the sound of his voice, looks up at George like he's a child caught with his arm in the cookie jar. "Nothing."

George watches as his expression melts from surprise to indifference once again as he stands up, walks over to his wardrobe, not offering an explanation.

"Why were you messing with my floor?" George presses, crossing his arms over his chest.

Dream ignores him as he pulls a large back sweater from the wardrobe and tosses it onto his own bed. "I'm changing. Close your eyes, or leave, if it bothers you."

George doesn't relent. "I asked you a question."

"Okay," Dream responds, and George catches a glimpse of the skin of his back before he turns around, feeling himself flushing red.

When the sound of movement fades away, he turns around again to see Dream, dressed now, pulling the sleeves of his sweaters over his hands.

"You haven't answered it yet," George continues, but Dream doesn't seem to be taking him all that seriously.

"It's none of your business," Dream cuts him off sharply. "Don't worry about it. It doesn't concern

you.”

“Yes it does,” George argues back despite every cell in his body telling him to let go of the topic at hand, move on before it blows out of proportion into something he knows he will lose.

Dream walks back to the spot he was sat at, and taps the tile next to the one he was picking at with his toe. “Feel free to take a look yourself. It’s nothing.”

“At first you said it was none of my business,” George points out. “So it’s clearly something.”

Dream is getting visibly frustrated with him now, and George knows he should back down because there’s no way he’s winning a fight between the two of them, but he stands his ground. He watches the rise and fall of Dream’s chest, watches him clench and unclench his fists as he tries to keep his cool before he speaks again, voice low.

“George,” he starts. “You should leave it alone, please.”

The guilt comes all at once. George doesn’t know what he’s doing, picking fights with somebody who’s clearly very troubled, more troubled than he is. The self accusation of him being somebody who actually belongs here tears through his insides. He reminds himself why he’s here.

It’s a privilege to be.

“Okay,” he says shortly. “Sorry.”

Dream seems surprised at the sudden lack of resistance as George sits on his bed, pulls his father’s Bible from his bedside table. He flips to Proverbs, runs his finger down the side of the page, feels the thin material of the paper and closes his eyes for a moment. It almost feels like being home. He opens his eyes and stares at the page blankly, unable to read the words while his mind runs wild again.

George had gotten so lucky. He doesn’t know what he did to deserve being sent here. Too caught up in his pridefulness to really acknowledge how much worse it could have been for him if his parents didn’t love him the way they did.

Jericho can fix him. George believes it. If he can get through these three months, prove that what happened was just a lapse in judgement instead of a display of his character, he’s back on track to priesthood, to becoming a messenger of God the way he’s always been intended to be.

“So,” Dream starts, and George looks up at him, surprised. “What— how’d you find dinner?”

George shrugs. “It was alright.”

Dream nods, seemingly fed up with the small talk. George is half hopeful he’ll say something, anything, because he’d be lying if he said Dream didn’t intrigue him. Instead, he reels himself in, because he’s not here to get to know Dream, or anybody else for that matter. He’s here to repent, and he’s here to rid himself of the guilt that follows him around for being a sinner just like everyone else. Dream sits on the bed, and George catches him folding the corners of the pages of his Bible. When he catches George staring at him, he glares before straightening them out.

George doesn’t quite understand why Dream is so quick to make up his mind about him. When the clock hits eleven, he decides that it has been too long, too emotional of a day. From arguing with his father before he’d gotten into the car, to watching his mother cry the whole drive up here, George has a lot to reflect on, a lot of work he has to do so he can fix himself, fix this. It’s just three months.

He closes his eyes. Sleep doesn't come.

He gives up when he sees the light behind the sheer curtain turn golden. He hopes he doesn't end up falling asleep at any of the group activities, because it would be an awful first impression to give. He hopes the staff he meets today find him alright to work with.

He sits with Dream at the breakfast table, closes his eyes as they give thanks to God for the meal, and keeps them shut a second longer than the others. When he opens his eyes, Dream is watching him. He feels himself flush red as he starts at the hash browns and eggs on his plate.

His schedule is relatively relaxed, and he finds himself enjoying the activities. He meets a boy named Thomas and another named David who are a year older than him that invite him to sit next to them during lunch. He's more than happy to oblige, but can't stop himself from searching for Dream in the dining hall regardless. They lock eyes for a moment, before George pretends he wasn't looking for him in the first place.

David and Thomas are polite. Both of them are from Idaho. Thomas looks left, then right, before placing a hand over George's.

"I fell into the wrong crowd," he admits, piercing gray eyes boring into George's. "I started taking money from my parents— *stealing*, failed so many of my classes. But I feel like that was a past life George, I really do."

George feels something close up inside of his throat at the sincerity in Thomas's confession.

"But I'm different now," he insists. "And I cannot undo the wrong I did before, but I hope to be better going forward."

George nods again, unwilling to look away from him. Something uneasy is churning inside of him, before he recognises it as jealousy. He curses himself for feeling it, because it's not right to feel jealous of somebody who was already forgiven when he haven't faced the consequences of his actions himself.

He wonders if he's expected to share the reason he ended up here, and panic swells up in his chest as he scrambles to come up with a believable lie. Thomas seems to notice his internal conflict.

"Please don't feel pressured to give me the reason you're here," Thomas says softly as he withdraws his hand. "I'm sharing, with the hope to comfort. I came in the middle of the last session, so I know how hard it is to be new."

George nods as he stabs his fork into the center of the spaghetti. "Thank you."

They chat some more. David plans to go to college in the spring to become an architect, while Thomas is hoping to spend some time back home with his family before deciding what he wants to do.

He spends the evening in the chapel, writing down his reflections on the day's prayers while translucent light filters in through the window. He tries his best not to look at the altar, partially out of shame, partially out of guilt. He goes to help with the dishes after dinner.

When he gets back to his room in the evening, he opens the door to see Dream looking at him with

anger in his eyes.

George doesn't address it, in case his judgement of what Dream is feeling is wrong. Dream doesn't say anything, but George can feel his scornful gaze following him as he moves around the room, putting things that he had misplaced in the morning back into their proper spots.

When he can't take it any longer, he finally speaks.

"Can I help you, Dream?"

Dream's hair is slicked back today, while a single traitorous curl kisses over the skin of his forehead. "Didn't take you to be that kind of person that got along with David and Thomas."

George is confused at this. Dream doesn't seem to particularly get along with anyone, but he doesn't say the thought out loud.

"What do you mean?"

Dream rolls his eyes, crosses his arms. "I would stay away from them."

"Yeah, *you* do stay away from them," George clarifies. "I'm not you. Also, it's not nice to gossip."

Dream stares at him in disbelief now, like George has sprouted wings and extra hands. "You can't be serious."

George tries to think of possible reasons Dream could dislike the two of them, but none come to mind. Sister Catherine had told George that Dream was in for a worse offense than the other boys here, so George is sure Dream is in no place to judge.

"They were very nice," George insists. "They aren't who they used to be. Well, I don't know who David used to be, but Thomas seems to have—"

"Are you *serious*, George?"

"I don't understand what you're upset about!"

"They're bad people—"

"I would appreciate if you would tell me why you think that instead of just restating the fact you think I'm horrible for getting along with them—"

"I'm trying!" Dream practically shouts.

George is silent, feels himself shrink down at the outburst, as Dream comes to the realization of just how loud he's being.

He hates being Dream's roommate, he's decided. He'd tried so hard to avoid a conflict between the two of them, when he's not the one who has a history of getting into trouble. He would be lying if he said he didn't enjoy the panic in Dream's expression as the clambouring of footsteps up the stairs gets louder.

"Shit," Dream curses, hands flying up to his hair as he runs his fingers through it in distress, effectively ruining the hairstyle.

It serves him right, George thinks. After terrorizing the staff here, clearly, to the point where most of them choose to avoid him, after playing the victim time and time again in the few interactions

the two of them have, to the point where he sees himself as some sort of black sheep in a community of such nice and welcoming people, he's bound to deserve some sort of consequence for his attitude.

It's very hard to continue that line of thought when he notices that Dream is shaking. So when Sister Catherine opens the door, with four of the priests behind her, and all five pairs of eyes are on the two of them, George finds himself speaking before he even fully comprehends what he's doing.

"Sorry for the noise," he blurts out.

He feels the attention in the room shift to him.

"George?" Sister Catherine speaks slowly. "Is everything okay?"

She glances at Dream, before looking back to him.

"Yes," George continues. "My apologies for yelling. We've been trying to center the rug," he gestures towards the floor. "It's a little bit crooked. We had a misunderstanding, that's all."

Sister Catherine visibly relaxes at this news. "Ah. Alright. Just try to be quieter, yeah?"

Dream mutters out an apology as well, before the crowd at the door glances around their room once more before closing the door. They listen to ensure everybody else is back downstairs, before Dream turns to him, an unreadable expression on his face.

"A thank you would suffice," George says to him smartly.

"I can't believe you lied to Sister Catherine," Dream responds, grinning as the realization of what he did settles in.

There was no need to lie, no need to try and be a hero for Dream who very clearly did not appreciate his efforts.

"Whatever," he responds, kicking his feet up over the duvet as he reaches for his father's Bible from his nightstand.

Dream shrugs, seemingly uninterested in him again, and it makes something inside of George snap again.

"What's your problem?" George asks, feeling the frustration bubble up. "I didn't—I never did anything to you."

"I'm not treating you special," Dream jeers.

"So you're just this horrible to everyone?"

Dream outright laughs in his face, and it angers George even further. He's ruining everything. It isn't George's fault Dream is so very clearly unhappy with himself and his situation, so he doesn't understand who he has to suffer from it the most.

"Thomas and David aren't good people. Would you like to know what I know?"

"Actually, no, I don't," George tells him, pulling the covers further up his chest. "You never have a nice thing to say about anyone."

"You never have a nice thing to say about anyone," Dream mocks him in a high pitched voice.

“Alright, fine. When you land yourself in trouble, don’t come crying to me.”

“I’ve done nothing to you,” George tries. “I don’t understand why you’re so hostile.”

“I’m hostile because you act like you’re so high and mighty, when you’re just as bad as me, as everybody else here,” Dream says it back easily, like he’s been waiting for this opportunity since the moment he’s met George.

George sees the glint in his eye, knows it’s no good for himself if he makes an enemy of the person he sees the most, but he supposes there isn’t much good between the two of them to begin with.

“Enlighten me then,” George starts, and he can tell Dream is delighted by his words by the way his mouth curls into a sneer.

“Why are you here, George?”

George stops, thinks about the question. “That’s none of your business.”

“You did something, clearly,” Dream continues. “You’re harbouring a lot of guilt.”

“You did something too,” George points out. “You fought someone. I’ve never hit anybody in my life.”

It’s Dream’s turn to laugh at him, again. “Do you really think I’m stupid enough to just give you the real reason I’m here?”

George’s heart drops to his stomach.

“Do you think that you, after being here for two days, know this place and the people here better than me?” he continues, tilting his head sideways, waiting for the answer.

George elects to remain silent.

“You do though,” Dream continues. “You’re like everyone else that comes here. You think you’re special because you repent, or whatever, and that what you have with God is special. But there’s something about you that’s different. Want me to take a stab at what it is?”

George wraps his arms around his shoulders tighter, feels his pulse in his entire body and he hopes that Dream hasn’t found something out about him, somehow, that would give him a leg up.

“I don’t think you’re sorry for what you did,” Dream admits. “*I think that you think you can make everyone else think you’re just some victim of circumstance, someone that made a mistake one time.*”

“Stop,” George tells him firmly. “You’re wrong. I’m not some—I’m not a victim here. I made a mistake, I know that. But at least I can own up to the fact that I made one.”

“You don’t know me,” Dream says back, sitting down on his own bed, fiddling with the string of his lamp.

“Well, you don’t know me either,” George defends. “And I didn’t want you to hate me, but you do, for some reason.”

“I never said I hated you,” Dream retorts, and George is exhausted from this conversation already.

“Okay,” he responds. “I think I’m going to go to sleep.”

Dream sighs, but goes to turn off the lights. George stares at the ceiling, in hopes that if he stares long enough, the drywall will come falling down and take him out, and he'll awaken at home, in his own bed, and the whole experience will have been nothing but an odd dream.

"I don't like you," Dream admits in the darkness of their room. "I think you're putting on an act, pretending to be innocent where you aren't."

"That's none of your business, even if it were the truth," George bites back.

"You act guilty."

George has nothing to say to that. Dream doesn't seem to care enough to try and pry any more information out of him. He hears the squeaking of the bed as Dream turns over to sleep, and only then does George let the impact of his words wash over him.

There are blatantly wrong accusations that Dream is throwing at him. George considers himself an honest person, doesn't consider himself as some scapegoat for his family. He made his choice, and the people around him had decided that he deserved to repent instead of being punished. It isn't his fault that he's one of the people who was sent here for personal healing. Dream had taken a wide range of shots at him, and didn't really have a clue of what's going on.

He did get one thing right. George feels guilty. When he's left to his own devices, in the dark, when he can barely hear Dream breathing beside him, he finally admits to himself that it isn't really about the fact he did it.

What George really feels guilty about is getting caught. He hates himself for it.

Chapter End Notes

hiii

hope you enjoyed this chapter, would love 2 know your thoughts in the comments :)

don't be scared to come chat w me on twitter (in the links at the bottom).

see you in the next one :)

uppercut

Chapter Summary

The thickening fog with sooty smell
Has blanketed the motor power
Which turns the London streets to hell;
And footsteps with their lonely sound
Intensify the silence round.

I haven't hope. I haven't faith.
I live two lives and sometimes three.
The lives I live make life a death

- Robert Frost, Guilt

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's his fault. George reminds himself every waking moment.

There were alternatives, places he could get help, things he could have done *without* throwing his life away. He should have loved his mother, loved his father, loved God enough to not follow through. He wishes he didn't get caught, wishes he could dissolve into starmatter and cease to exist altogether.

George could have chosen to bear his burden, to grit his teeth and get through this life for a chance at achieving eternal perfection, and instead he chose to take his chances with what was here. In the fog of emotion, he had been so caught up with what he thinks he knows, he had forgotten about what he didn't.

George believes in God. He comes from a God fearing home and has God fearing friends, and he wasn't supposed to end up like this. Nobody expected it from him, which makes it worse.

He's the only one that doubts his faith, which means that he has fooled everyone into thinking he is holy, when he's really a fraud.

George is afraid because sometimes he thinks that the worst of him is *all* there is of him. He feels like he should have melted into the ground instead of died that day, and ceased to exist altogether. He doesn't deserve this kindness, not when he can't tell the truth to anyone around him, when he can't even tell the truth to *himself* about what he believes. He thinks of the fragments of time between realities, tries to remember what it felt like to try and search for the eyes of God and being met with emptiness, void and void and void.

He's not in the void, not anymore. He's stuck here. Smooth plastered walls, solid gray bed frames, smile lines and people that think he's worthy of salvation, while George begins to let the world plague his mind and drown himself in the belief that his faith is the biggest lie to himself that he has ever told.

He excuses the thoughts as intrusive, pardons himself from picturing hellfire in the red of nothingness when he closes his eyes in the direction of the morning sun.

George wakes while the light is still bleeding into the sky. He sits up and rubs his eyes, before glancing over at the bed adjacent to him. Careful not to wake up Dream, he tiptoes towards the window and pulls the sheer curtains to the side to reveal the expanse of land their room faces. In the distance, there are hills covered in snow.

Someone stirs behind him. "There's a ski resort right behind, over there."

George turns to see Dream running a hand through his hair, heavy bags under his eyes. "Oh."

"They take a trip there, closer to Christmas," Dream continues. "You'll get to go."

George nods as Dream turns to sit on his own bed and grabs a chain with a cross pendant from his bedside table. He watches as Dream frowns in concentration, struggling with the clasp. The muscles in his jaw pull tighter as he squints. George can't help but study him; long limbs and paling skin, like he doesn't see the sun very often. If he looks closer, dehydration lines run across his forehead, lips chapped and fingernails bitten short, hair just a little longer than the other boys. Against his better judgement, he imagines Dream with sun kissed skin and freckles dotting his cheeks, lively looking instead of gaunt, a version of him that's handsome and happy.

"Can you help me?"

The imaginary saturation in Dream's features fades away, and the Dream that exists sits in its place. He's holding out the chain hesitantly.

"Yeah," George breathes out, forcing himself to tear his eyes away. "Can I sit?"

Dream shifts to make space for him, palm against the nape of his head to push away his hair as George climbs onto his mattress. His hands shake as he presses his nail into the latch. He leans in closer, closer, holding his breath as he hooks it together. He exhales through his mouth as he gets it, and he watches Dream's shoulders tense as George's fingers brush against his heated skin. "Sorry," George mutters as he lets go of Dream, climbs off his bed.

Dream says a quiet thank you, seemingly mellowed out despite their disagreement the night before.

He catches Dream picking at the floorboards again. This time it's after lunch. Dream is sat on the floor, looking up at him with wide eyes as he holds something behind his back.

"What are you doing?" George asks, stepping closer.

Perhaps he's getting a little overconfident with his assessment that Dream won't hurt him. For somebody who is seemingly such a delinquent, he seems terrified of any confrontation with authority. George will admit he admires his ability to put up such a stone cold front during the daylight hours. He doesn't think he's seen Dream even close to smiling when they're with the large

group. Everyone seems to leave him alone and he seems content with that.

“Nothing,” Dream spits the words out between gritted teeth, like *George* is the one inconveniencing him. “I thought you had Bible study.”

“I finished early,” George informs him. “And I came to grab something, but you’re here on the floor. Again.”

“It’s nothing,” Dream tries, shoulders tensing as he clutches whatever he’s hiding behind his back tighter.

George is beginning to think that he’s all bark, no bite, so he steps closer.

“George,” Dream warns. “It’s nothing.”

“Show me what’s behind your back,” George demands.

Dream looks like a deer caught in headlights, but he holds his ground. “I can’t tell you.”

“I’m not lying for you again,” George tells him, crossing his arms over his chest. “I’ll call Sister Catherine right now.”

He doesn’t have time for this exchange.

“George,” Dream repeats, like saying his name will make him change his mind. “I can’t—it isn’t anything.”

He stands up, hands still behind his back, and George thinks he’s an idiot. Without thinking, he steps forward again, and Dream holds out a hand in front of him to keep him at a distance.

“No,” Dream speaks slowly, like George is some sort of *dog*.

“I’ll get them,” George threatens again.

“You won’t,” Dream challenges.

George has no reason to show any sort of loyalty towards Dream, not when the time they spend together is spent arguing over nothing, not when Dream is so angry with him all the time over what George does in his own time. He thinks of requesting a room change, but he’s sure that it wouldn’t be a very fruitful endeavour.

“Why?” George tries his luck, tilts his head. “You’re clearly scared of them.”

Dream scoffs. “I’m not scared of them.”

“Okay,” George is running out of patience. “Then I’m going to call them.”

They stare at each other, seemingly at a stalemate. George decides that this isn’t worth the headache.

“Forget it,” he mutters, not willing to deal with the questions and the staring.

If Dream is plotting to kill him by cracking the floorboards close to George’s bed so that he collapses into the main level when he lies down, it may as well happen sooner or later. When George lies down and closes his eyes, he hears the opening and closing of the wardrobe door.

“You didn’t call them,” Dream points out.

George wants him to be quiet. “No. Let me sleep.”

Dream doesn’t bother him after that.

George sits with Thomas during dinner.

“What are you planning to do after you leave here, George?”

George pokes his fork into the peas, tries to stack two on each prong. “Seminary.”

Thomas raises his eyebrows, impressed. “Wow. Not a surprise.”

George mutters out a thanks, before wincing when he realizes how rude he’s being. “Sorry, just getting a bit of a migraine.”

“Oh, no worries,” Thomas waves him off, placing a hand on his shoulder.

He begins to talk about his architecture portfolio, but George isn’t listening all too well. His eyes wander to where Dream is sitting, at the back, alone. He catches George looking and raises an eyebrow, but George looks away.

“Heard you’re being made to share a room with Dream,” Thomas tells him, offering a sympathetic look. “He’s not giving you too much trouble, is he?”

“He’s fine,” George says, moving to change the subject.

Thomas looks left, then right, and then moves closer. “If I had gotten thrown into a room with him, I would have created problems.”

“He’s fine, really,” George insists.

Whatever Dream had done to get in here, and whatever he had done in his time here was very clearly a serious offense. George thinks back to the floorboards and wonders if there’s anything he has to be worried about.

“Actually,” George starts. “Do you know what he did? I keep hearing people talking about it, but I don’t know what.”

“Unbelievable,” Thomas scoffs, leaning back in his chair. “He’s violent, George. He’s been alright these past three months, but on my third day here, during the last session, he almost fucking broke this kid’s jaw.”

George feels the familiar uneasiness creeping up on him. “What?”

Thomas glances around them again. Sister Catherine is in the kitchen, and the priests seem to be quietly speaking amongst themselves. He leans in close to speak to George.

“There was a boy named Ethan,” he starts. “He was very loud and proud about his relationship with God. Very nice guy. His mother would sometimes bake brownies and bring them in on the weekends, since his family doesn’t live too far from here.”

George nods.

“I don’t know why he was here, to be honest. Wouldn’t have hurt a fly.”

“So how did he manage to provoke Dream?” George asks curiously.

Thomas’s eyes go cold. “What do you mean, provoke Dream? He did nothing wrong.”

“I don’t mean it like that,” George rushes to reassure him. “I don’t—I don’t particularly *like* Dream, but I mean—I don’t know. I don’t *know* him yet.”

Thomas’s gaze softens. “Oh, alright. Just— yeah, I don’t know. Dream’s never really—I mean, he does what he’s supposed to do, but I don’t think he’s actually religious. He doesn’t really seem to care. A lot of us don’t really care, coming in here. But most of us change our minds.”

George hums to show he’s still listening.

“Dream and him were in the chapel at the same time,” Thomas starts, and something begins to twist inside of George’s stomach uncomfortably. “And then there was shouting, supposedly. And then, Ethan screamed. And the Sisters and the priests came rushing in and ushered us all to our rooms, but I snuck out for water a half hour later, and I saw Ethan had a black eye and a bruised jaw.”

George swallows hard. He remembers Dream telling him he’s one of those on the first night, and his stomach churns at the memory of him instigating a problem just a few hours earlier.

“He was sitting in the kitchen, with one of the Sisters,” Thomas continues. “And he went home the next morning. I’m sure he’s fine, but you’ve got to be a real piece of shit to hit someone like Ethan. Especially in the chapel. I just—I don’t know. Supposedly he’s gotten in trouble with every single group here, and he’s been here since he was like, twelve. Even his parents don’t want him.”

The last sentence is delivered as though it is some sort of holy justice, that Dream is unwanted, even though it happened before he had the opportunity to make a mistake. George nods, taking in the information, and stays silent despite the desire to learn more. The conversation steers towards the upcoming Christmas. Thomas speaks, mouth moving with conviction as he talks about how he’s hopeful he’ll get to take a trip to town the next weekend if his parents allow it. George thinks of sunken eyes and curled up fists and shaking palms.

Despite his better judgement, he brings it up.

“I want to make you a deal,” George tells Dream the moment he enters the room.

Dream is disinterested once again, looking George over once and then electing to move on.

“Dream,” George tries again.

When Dream doesn’t look at him, George decides to walk over to the part of the floor that he’s always so enamoured with, and sit down next to it. He catches his attention now.

“What?”

“What happened with you and Ethan?”

George watches as Dream’s expression morphs into confusion, and then recognition, and then anger. The corner of his jaw flexes.

“Who told you that?”

It’s George’s turn to stay quiet.

“George,” Dream repeats, moving towards him in record time. “Are you— Did Thomas tell you about that? What did he tell you?”

“I don’t know,” George responds, crossing his arms as he leans back against the leg of the bed.

Perhaps blackmail isn’t the healthiest way to build their relationship. George finds he’s passed caring. The staff here seem to like him okay. He has one or two people he’s amicable enough with to pass the time. He doesn’t need anything from Dream, and if Dream wants to keep secrets, George wants to make sure that they aren’t going to end up hurting him.

It’s self defense, he justifies, as Dream crouches down so that they’re sitting eye level now.

“George,” Dream says his name again, and it’s driving George *mad*.

“I have *every* right to know,” he says coldly, “I have every right to ask what kind of— who I’m even sharing a room with, because—”

“Because *what*? You think I’m gonna hit you?”

“I didn’t say that,” George crosses his arms. “But it doesn’t help when you’re a prick, and all I know about you is that you’re dangerous.”

The silence is heavy as it hangs over the room. Dream’s expression hardens, and George watches as the red in his cheeks melts back into the grey, as he digs his dull fingernails into his palms.

“Keep your voice down,” Dream pleads. “It’s not—”

“It’s not what, Dream?” he asks, speaking even louder this time.

Dream runs a hand through his hair, nervously, as he sits down on the floor next to George. “You can’t tell anyone this.”

George frowns. “I can’t promise that.”

“Then I can’t show you,” Dream tells him. “George, you *can’t* tell anyone, if I show you what I was doing.”

George looks at him, really looks at him for the second time. Eyes wide and desperate, the cross of his necklace twisted around so the polished side of it is pressed to the skin of his neck instead of outwards. He contemplates if it’s worth it.

“Is it going to end up hurting me?”

He looks Dream in the eyes, watches for a sign of dishonesty. Instead, Dream looks offended. He gets up from the floor.

“No,” he tells George, not even facing him. “It has nothing to do with you.”

“Then why can’t you tell me?”

“Because there’s nothing to tell,” Dream recovers smoothly.

George stays there for a moment, hugs his knees to his chest as he looks up at Dream. It makes him feel smaller.

“What did you mean? When you told me I was one of those people, the first day I came here?” George asks despite his better judgement.

Dream moves things around on his desk, seemingly avoiding the question, but George continues to bore holes into the back of his neck with his eyes.

“Nothing,” Dream says so quietly that George would have missed it if he wasn’t listening for it. “It just means you’re like everyone else here.”

George scoffs. “C’mon. How’s everyone else here, then?”

Something inside of Dream seems to snap as he spins around. “You wanna know what I think?”

Enlighten me, George wants to say. He keeps quiet, gestures for Dream to step forward and talk. Dream inhales, exhales, closes his eyes, and then decides that he isn’t worth it. It’s infuriating.

George has been searching for the truth since he got here. Everyone around him seems more than willing to give their version of it to him, except for the person who it incriminates. Dream is more than content to play the victim in this situation instead of doing something, instead of changing. He shoots down any opportunity to relieve himself of his role as the outcast, instead opting to be, in his eyes, misunderstood. It drives George fucking crazy.

“Fine,” George mutters out. “Don’t tell me. You’re only doing yourself a disservice.”

Dream laughs, outright. “Oh no, don’t know how I’ll ever recover from not being in your good books, George.”

“I’m trying to understand you,” George says the words quietly. They ring out in the silence of the room, as if he was whispering into an empty chapel.

It doesn’t make sense, the way Dream presents himself as some two dimensional person, the way he’s always just passing the time while his mind is somewhere else.

“George,” Dream repeats. “I fought that guy— Ethan, because he pissed me off. But I’m not going to hurt you.”

“I know that,” George tells him, but he doesn’t believe him.

Dream leaves shortly after, and George sits by the windowsill, watches as snowflakes dance in the wind before floating to the floor.

There’s at minimum, a forty foot drop to the ground. It makes him dizzy if he stares too long. When he hears the click of the shower turn on, he climbs into bed and holds his father’s Bible to his chest. If he inhales the pages in the chapters he frequents less often, it still almost smells like home. He thinks of screaming and shouting, thinks of diary pages being set on fire and the dining table. He thinks of “*this is for your own good*” being code for “*we can’t stand to look at you, not like this*” and averted eyes.

The emptiness inside of him dares to open up again, asks for something from him to fill the space.
When George can't think of anything to give it, it takes a part of him instead.

Chapter End Notes

helloo:)

I just wanted to encourage everyone to read the tags - this is happy ending but take care of yourselves <3

Hope you all enjoyed the chapter!! Please lmk your thoughts in the comments if you would like, tysm for reading, see you in the next one!!

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through the glass

Chapter Summary

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us

- T.S Eliot, Ash Wednesday

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George is permitted to go to town for the weekend. He's been informed he can send letters, or purchase small items as long as he shows them to the chaperone and gets them approved. He gets up earlier than he usually does, shivering as his foot meets the cold tile of the room, and changes into jeans and an older sweater. It's the first time he's wearing his own clothes outside of his room.

Dream is still fast asleep by the time he leaves for downstairs. Thomas waves him over, tells George that David couldn't make it because he had managed to catch a fever. They line up against the wall, wait for one of the chaperones to give them the go ahead. The walk down the driveway feels longer than George remembers it. There is a school bus down the street that they silently climb onto.

Thomas talks about how he's going to go shopping for a present for his mother, since her birthday is coming up, and needs to post it alongside a letter. George informs him that he's mainly just there to explore.

When they arrive at town, George finds that there is not much to look at. A convenience store sits beside the drugstore, both looking beaten down. Thomas bids him farewell there, and then tells George to meet him at the deli down the road for lunch.

He turns to see the chaperone has sat himself down on a bench, and has pulled out a newspaper. Left to his own devices, he wanders into what looks to be a thrift store.

The aisles are bare. A woman asks if he needs any help, but he declines politely, and opts to look around by himself.

An old doll with blacked out eyes sits on the shelf next to a tea set with the Disney insignia painted onto the side. He continues onwards, sees broken music boxes, photo frames with cracks in the edges. He stumbles upon something still in its packaging, and reaches out to examine it.

A stack of postcards in plastic wrap, seemingly in different colours. He wonders if he would be allowed to hang them up around the room. He reminds himself to ask Thomas if they are permitted

to decorate. If he isn't, he can always use the backs for his daily prayer reflections, or to write letters to his parents.

He wonders if they have even thought to write.

They couldn't even look at him for the last week he spent at home. He pushes the thought aside.

He walks up to the cashier, drops a dollar on the counter. He's handed a receipt and decides to go sit with the chaperone. He shivers, pulling his coat closer to his chest as he approaches the park bench.

"Hello, Father," he tries, crossing his fingers in hopes of getting the title correct.

The chaperone looks up at him and smiles. "George. Pleasure to see you. Please, sit."

George obliges. "Thank you, Father...?"

"Joseph," the man tells him. "What have you got there?"

George flushes red. He feels like he's being talked down to. He's not here to keep what's left of his pride together, he reminds himself. "Postcards. Thought they were nice."

Father Joseph hums in approval.

"I was wondering," George starts hesitantly, afraid to come off over enthusiastic in a way that was irritating. "About your journey in priesthood."

Father Joseph immediately sits up straighter. "Of course. Are you thinking of joining yourself?"

George nods. "I'm planning on applying after I go home."

Father Joseph tells him that he wanted to be a doctor, and tells him he had always felt an inclination to serve. George watches as his hands move in the air as he tells his story, watches them tremble when they still, like something holy is coursing through him.

"What do you think of when you think of faith, George?"

He thinks of light filtering through stain glass, he thinks of the cross hanging from his neck like a dog collar. He thinks of his mother chiding him for folding the pages of the Bible, thinks of writing lines and sore wrists. He thinks of screaming matches, hands around his arms, thinks of being dragged to hell and burning, leaving his mother in heaven with the agony of knowing her son has failed her.

George remembers fear. He gives it a different name. "I think of love."

Father Joseph pauses, waits for George to elaborate.

"I think it's knowing the worst of something," George continues, as something guilty burns in his chest. "Choosing to love it anyways."

He remembers soft hands carding through his hair, thinks about how his father had looked the night he found out. He remembers watching him sink to his knees, watching him clasp his hands and murmur a prayer for George to be forgiven in a frequency that had burned itself into his bones. He thinks of the Church in the morning, lovely and beautiful and inviting, arms open and teary eyed, begging him to come home, *George, come home.*

“Knowing the worst of yourself,” he continues, ignoring the blaring sirens in his mind, the devil calling him *liar, liar*, “and believing there is something worth saving.”

Father Joseph hums again, and George feels like he’s going to drown in himself.

“There is a local parish here that allows volunteers to sit in on meetings,” Father Joseph informs him. “I can ask and see if I can set up a mentor for you.”

Another person George will make a fool of. “Thank you, Father.”

The conversation draws to a close. George cannot bear being here any longer. “I agreed to meet David for lunch, I should probably go.”

Father Joseph bids him goodbye, but not before bringing his hand down on George’s shoulder, telling him he sees someone good inside of him. George bites down the bile and spits out a thank you, before walking upwards towards the deli.

David talks to him about how he’s going to be reading at mass tomorrow, and George suddenly can’t stomach his sandwich. He tucks it into his bag and tries his best to be attentive, asks questions where he sees fit.

David doesn’t seem to mind very much, more than content to just speak and speak and speak. He continues all the way back up the walkway and onto the bus. George presses his forehead against the cold glass of the window when he sits down, closes his eyes and tries to think of all the life he has to live once he’s out of here.

It rains on the drive back.

George comes back to their room to see Dream on the floor, but not picking at the floorboards this time. He’s on his belly, legs swinging in the air as he absentmindedly draws circles into his notebook. He looks up when he sees George enter, and sits up immediately.

“There’s a perfectly good bed and chair,” George greets in lieu of a hello.

Dream scowls up at him. “Okay.”

George isn’t particularly afraid of him anymore, so he glances towards the floorboard that Dream seems to be so protective of, and watches Dream tense in response. He glances up at George, almost challengingly, and George feels bad.

“Sorry,” he offers. “I was just joking.”

Dream’s brows stay furrowed as he looks at him, but he doesn’t get visibly angrier. He’s so odd at times, that George doesn’t understand if he’s endeared or concerned by it. Judging from the reactions of everyone around him, he supposes he should be more conscious in not trying to provoke the most dangerous man in this building. Then he hears the words spoken so quietly, that he almost misses them.

“It’s okay.”

Dream has gone back into drawing circles into his book, and George decides to leave it at that. He

washes up and changes back into his pyjamas, and returns to Dream sitting at a desk.

He spends the rest of the afternoon lying in bed, basking in the sun. He closes his eyes.

He wakes up to Dream gingerly shaking one of his shoulders. When George stirs, he moves back, like he wasn't trying to get caught. George stares at him for a moment, before Dream finally speaks.

"Dinner time is soon," Dream tells him. "You should change into your uniform."

"Thanks," George tells him groggily, rubbing his eyes as he sits up.

He stumbles into the bathroom and changes again, presses his cold fingers underneath his eyes in an attempt to get them to swell less. When he's satisfied, he walks out to see Dream not changed, sitting on his own bed.

"Aren't you coming?"

Dream looks at him and shakes his head no. George waits for an explanation, but when he isn't offered one, he steps out into the hallway. He runs into Sister Catherine on the way down.

"George," she says, out of breath. "Are you okay?"

George feels confused. "Yes? Is everything alright?"

He watches as Sister Catherine visibly looks relieved. "I forgot to find you and tell you to stay out of your room in case Dream was in there."

George feels guilty. "Oh, I'm sorry—he was writing when I came in, I didn't know he was doing something that required him to not be disturbed—"

"No, no," she waves him off. "He's—he isn't going to be at the dinner table with the rest of us today, he'll be eating in his room."

George is even more confused. "Is everything okay?"

Sister Catherine opens her mouth to say something, but then closes it immediately, seemingly remembering that George is one of the people here for treatment and not a counselor. Then, she seems to remember that George is rooming with what seems to be the devil incarnate according to the way he's treated by everyone here. He bites his tongue.

"Dream had a bit of an— *outburst*, earlier today," she tells him hesitantly. "Do not speak of it to anyone. We can put you in a different room tonight, but we don't want to have to deal with complaints regarding confidentiality, so it's up to you."

George's heart skips a beat. "I'm good to stay in our room, thank you. I will yell if I require assistance, but I doubt it."

Sister Catherine thanks him for being so understanding, and lets him continue on his way to the dining hall. He sits with Thomas again, who continues to tell George about how he hates public speaking, and how his parents are driving up to come see it. George nods along hollowly again, mind racing a million miles a minute as he tries to contemplate what it is Dream could have done.

He wonders if he will ever have to witness his anger manifest into something worse.

Dream is lanky, but he's tall, and he's got something in his eyes that could very easily turn mean. George wouldn't want to involve himself in any altercations with him, which works out *perfectly* with how he's been dealing with their less than amicable relationship.

He sits through dinner, mind wandering when he closes his eyes for the prayer before the meal. When he makes his way back up the stairs, Sister Catherine reminds him that all he has to do is shout.

It's a little unnerving, how everyone here makes it seem like they're sending George into the lion's cage every time he walks up to his own room. He chalks it up to a legality thing, is sure that anyone who has to share a room with someone who could have violent tendencies is told the same thing as him.

He enters. Dream's head whips in the direction of the door when he steps in, but upon realizing it's just George, turns back around and wraps his arms around his torso.

"Hi," George tries. "Everything alright?"

Dream scoffs. "Did they tell you already?"

"Tell me what?"

Dream rolls his eyes, mutters something under his breath. George makes out a *never mind*.

"How was dinner?" Dream asks. "Did anyone say anything about me?"

This should be confirmation that something bad did happen. This should be where George decides that he should stop prodding around for information.

"Yes, actually," he says, watching as Dream closes his eyes and presses his lips closer together so that they become one thin line. "Sister Catherine was— she was wondering if you were okay."

"I didn't even mean to," Dream spits out, crossing his arms over his chest before he seems to remember that he's talking to George.

He tenses up, pushes himself backwards.

"Did you finish dinner?" George asks, and Dream gets up without answering him and walks into the bathroom.

George isn't quite sure why he has to be so hostile all the time. He was actually under the impression that they were making positive progress today, but it never seems to actually be that way, not with Dream. He tries to push it from his mind.

It doesn't work.

He has reason to back off. It's been confirmed that Dream is dangerous, from the people around him, from Dream himself. Still, George can't bring himself to believe it, not when he hasn't seen it with his own two eyes.

He sits on the floor, next to the floorboard that Dream seems to be fixated on, and picks at one of the corners. He hears the tap stop running, and feels the blood rush into his ears as he hears the doorknob turn. Adrenaline courses through him, and it's last chance to move, but he stays put.

Dream opens the door and sees him. George waits. When nothing happens, he finally speaks.

“What happened with you earlier today?”

Dream glares daggers at him. “None of your business.”

George is playing with fire. “Sister Catherine told me you had an outburst.”

“I didn’t,” Dream mutters, staring at the floor.

“Then what happened?”

“I don’t want to tell you,” Dream snaps. “It’s not— stop— I didn’t do anything.”

“So she’s lying?” George presses forward.

Dream’s shoulders slump and he looks up at George, the opposite of angry to his surprise. He looks tired, looks young and worn down all at once, and George feels the guilt pooling in his belly again.

“Sorry,” George says as he climbs to his feet. “I didn’t— I’m sorry.”

This isn’t like him. It isn’t. He’s supposed to be understanding and kind and good, have some sort of transcendental version of peace that lives inside of him. He’s supposed to be patient and good.

“It’s okay,” Dream whispers, and George wonders how the hell someone with supposedly such a short temper always seems to let him get away with acting like such a prick.

“No,” George continues. “I’m— that’s not— I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s gotten into me.”

“Well, when you hang around assholes, you’re sure to learn a thing or two,” Dream says the words softly, offering a smile.

It’s a jab at his supposed friends, but George owes him one, so he laughs at the attempt to change the topic. He sits on his bed quietly after that, pulls out his father’s Bible. Dream tosses and turns in bed.

After a while, Dream speaks again, in the same feathery tone. “Sorry.”

George shakes his head no, not looking up from the page. “Is everything okay?”

He looks up to see Dream looking conflicted, like he isn’t sure he wants to tell George this or not.

“You don’t have to tell me,” he adds for good measure. “I know you didn’t want to earlier, but just — I don’t know. Hope you’re okay.”

He watches Dream hollow out his cheeks for a moment as he thinks. He looks even more weary than he usually does, now that George is looking at him properly. He wonders when the last time he had seen Dream outside had been, and he isn’t able to conjure up a single memory. Dream watches him back, and George wonders what he’s thinking, if he’s as fascinated by George as George is by him.

It’s unlikely, but George indulges in the idea of being somebody who was worth worrying about. Finally, Dream speaks.

“I’m fine,” he whispers. “Just— I’m hungry.”

George frowns. “Did they not send enough for you for dinner?”

Dream shakes his head no. “They didn’t— they must have forgotten. To send someone up.”

George wonders if he distracted Sister Catherine when she was meant to be bringing Dream dinner. Hot shame burns in his veins, and he reprimands himself for not noticing earlier. There are no dirty plates or cups or utensils anywhere to be seen. He isn’t Dream’s keeper, he tries to remind himself. Still, he feels responsible.

“George,” Dream whispers. “Don’t— don’t bring this up to them, okay? It’s just— it’s fine.”

“It’s not,” George disagrees, and Dream seems to start to panic. “I won’t— I won’t tell them, promise. But you can’t starve.”

“It’s just one night, it’s okay,” Dream insists. “I’ve done it before.”

“You’ve done it before?”

Dream’s eyes widen, like he’s let something slip he isn’t supposed to. “I mean not eating dinner, and getting hungry after. I’ll be okay.”

“I have taffy,” George tells him. “If you— I have a sandwich as well, in my backpack.”

Dream doesn’t meet his eye. “It’s okay.”

“You’re hungry,” George repeats, and Dream physically recoils.

He gets out of bed and grabs his backpack, hands the brown paper bag to Dream before he can say no. “I’ve taken a bite of it, but if that bothers you, you can just tear around it.”

Dream looks at him, eyes glossy, and George can’t help but feel viscerally upset.

“Thank you,” Dream whispers, as he walks towards his chair and sits down.

George pretends to be preoccupied with reading his Bible in an attempt to give Dream some privacy, but there doesn’t seem to be very much of that considering how open their room is. He wonders if this was an honest mistake, or a deliberate attempt to teach Dream a lesson, but he can’t help but feel that it isn’t right.

“George?”

George can’t look at him, not now. He takes the coward’s way out and makes a noise of acknowledgement, swallows down the lump in his throat.

“I broke a plate today,” Dream confesses. “I didn’t— I didn’t mean to, but it slipped from my hand.”

George feels nauseous.

“I didn’t mean to,” Dream repeats, like he thinks George wouldn’t consider him someone who would tell the truth.

George’s heart aches.

“I didn’t,” Dream says with more desperation this time, like he needs George to have faith in him.

George understands, needing to be understood. He’s done his fair share of wrong, but he’s been dealt his own share of premature judgement to match. He knows that this place is holy, knows that

it's supposed to bring them closer to righteousness and their vocations and make them good. George knows that everyone here has known Dream longer than he has, but he can't help but question what faith is worth when it leaves people starving.

Perhaps it's an exaggeration in his own mind. Maybe George is faltering. He says what he knows.

"I believe you," George speaks into the quiet of the room.

Chapter End Notes

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sorry to the one person who saved the old playlist i deleted it because i wasn't feeling it

hope you enjoyed the chapter, feel free to come chat in the comments, see you in the next one :)

parasite

Chapter Summary

When grief sits with you, its tropical heat
thickening the air, heavy as water
more fit for gills than lungs;
when grief weights you down like your own flesh
only more of it, an obesity of grief,
you think, How can a body withstand this?

- Ellen Bass, The Thing Is

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream is gone before George wakes for breakfast.

The mass is uneventful. George stands when he's supposed to, sits when he's supposed to, half-listens to the homily and half tunes it out. He tries to picture himself standing there, but he can't. He gets distracted by the painting in the background, but tries his best to refocus.

George doesn't see him until lunch. He's sat alone at the back again, stabbing at a single piece of gnocchi, and George nearly walks over to accompany him. Instead, he's whisked away by David and Thomas, who bombard him with questions.

"Did you hear what happened yesterday? George?"

George turns to look at them, still half in his own mind. "Hm?"

"Dream attacked one of the chefs," Thomas whispers.

George wonders where they pull this information from. "I don't think so."

David scoffs. "I wouldn't put it past him, really."

George lets them talk, tunes out of the conversation in favour of picking at his salad, drawing thin lines in the dressing with his fork. David talks about his mother and father, says they're planning to come visit him the next weekend, and George pretends it doesn't burn him up on the inside. Jealousy is a useless emotion to feel, he tries to remind himself. Especially over something like this, considering the fact that he doesn't think he can look either one of his parents in the eye as of right now.

"Did he tell you what happened? George?" David asks him, leaning in.

George feels his stomach churn with uneasiness. "No, just went straight to bed."

When the meal draws to an end, he heads off the chapel in an attempt to find some sort of divine guidance, but finds himself unable to concentrate. One of his hands is colder than the other, the cars passing by the centre are too loud. He grits his teeth and tries to get through what he wants to

say, but it feels as though a blanket of fog has been draped over his mind. He stops trying to convince God he's a believer and comes up for air, lets himself think.

George remembers death brushing its fingernail against the bridge of his nose.

His parents had been frantic with worry when they had found him on the doorstep. He remembers cold hands pressed to his cheeks, fingers digging into his shoulder blades, begging him to stay alive. He remembers watching them panic and thinking that it was out of his hands at that point, and then he had woken up in a hospital bed, staring at the ceiling.

George shouldn't have gone to meet him.

He should have known better. It was so stupid of him to go out to the woods with someone he barely knew, so naive to assume that people *like him* from where he was from would engage in that behaviour so out in the open. The sort of recklessness that he had been approached with had lured him in, made him think that perhaps he could have something good with somebody and not have to keep it under lock and key.

He'd been so fucking wrong.

George had gone down the road and past the oak tree, thinking that he would be met with somebody like him, somebody who understood. Stupid, stupid, stupid, because he'd returned home bloodied, with a bruised jaw and cracked ribs and words ringing through his ear that he hears over and over when it gets too quiet.

His parents had doted over him in the days after, and George had been stupid enough to think that perhaps it was safe enough to tell the truth.

Now he's here.

It doesn't cut through him, not anymore. It's more of a dull ache that never goes away, an occasional thought creeping up on him in a way that is sinister.

God is supposed to help him. He stares up at the altar, stares at the rosary hanging on a nail in the wall, and wonders if all love is conditional. Because if God loved him, he would have saved him, even if George didn't believe he existed. If his parents loved him, they would have understood, would have *tried* to understand their son. Perhaps they did love him, the version of him that wasn't a sinner, wasn't tarnishing their name in a small town where everybody talks, wasn't sick. And maybe there's a version of him that God loves too; one that is faithful, one that is loyal, one that believes.

He closes his eyes so tightly that he's sure to see heaven in the fractures of the darkness. He's met with the abyss.

"Dream."

Dream finally turns to look at him. "Hi."

George doesn't know what he was expecting out of this conversation. They haven't been particularly nice to each other, but still, three months is an awfully long time to hate somebody that he lives with. He decides to take the initiative to extend an olive branch.

“How was your day?” He asks.

Dream looks at him, unimpressed, before turning back to what he’s doing on his desk. “Good.”

“How’d you find the mass?” George presses. “I might be reading next week.”

“Nice.”

“I need to find three other readers, and I was wondering if you would be interested—”

“No thanks,” Dream cuts him off before he can even finish. “Good luck, though.”

George senses he wants to be left alone, but he can’t help but feel desperate at this point. “People were asking me about you today.”

“Yeah?” Dream looks unfazed, still scribbling away on his page. “What’d they say, George?”

“Said you attacked someone,” George responds, but he rushes to add the next part. “I don’t know if you heard about that already, but—”

“What else have you heard?” Dream cuts him off with a flat tone, the sound of the pencil against the page loud in the absence of background noise. “That I’ve been here since I was a kid, been doing nothing but beating the shit out of poor kids who came here to be better?”

George swallows, unsure of how to start his answer. “I mean— yes, but—”

“And you think you can save me from eternal hellfire by being nice to me and making sure I close my eyes during prayer time, and that’ll make God love me, because it’s made God love you, right?”

“No,” George urges. “I’m not—”

“You think you’re some sort of martyr, think the world’s chewed you up and spit you out as some sort of test of faith,” Dream continues, and George watches as he finally turns to look at him.

He doesn’t look angry, doesn’t look afraid or meek or anything. Dream looks as sullen as he always has, and he delivers the next words like he knows they’re fact, like he’s been waiting for an opportunity to present this truth.

“But people like that, people that think they know better for me when they don’t even know anything about me—”

“I don’t believe them,” George spits out. “I believe you.”

The room goes silent. Dream stares at him, blank, lifeless eyes, and George wonders what has to happen to someone to make them too tired to even comply.

“But can’t you fake it?” George asks before he even thinks through what he’s saying. “Can’t you just pretend? They’ll leave you alone, and you’ll get to go out to the town, and you could get out of here.”

Dream laughs. “It’s not that easy.”

“Yes it is,” George tells him, frowning as he crosses his arms over his chest. “You don’t need me, or anyone else to tell you how to lie. They tell you what makes a good believer. You just have to go through the motions, pretend you’re thinking about—”

Dream looks at him, wide eyes, and George's heart sinks to his stomach when he realizes what he's just admitted to. Neither of them speak for a moment. George curses himself for being so careless.

"I mean," he starts in an attempt to fix things, but the damage is already done. "Fake it till you make it."

"Have you made it?" Dream asks, tilting his head as he leans back in his chair, looking George up and down agonizingly slow. "Managed to convince yourself you love it here, and that everything is great?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," George says nervously. "I wouldn't— obviously I wasn't talking about me—"

"George. Even if I told someone this, I doubt they would believe me," Dream says, rolling his eyes like he doesn't get why this is such a big deal. "You have everyone fooled, don't worry. Including me. I don't get why you're okay with living a lie."

"I'm not trying to fool you," George urges. "I'm—"

"Okay, you love God, and you believe in God," Dream finishes. "I changed my mind. I believe you. Everyone who matters believes you. But I don't think you believe yourself."

"You know nothing about me," George bites back, furious.

"And you know nothing about me," Dream finishes. "So let's both stop pretending we know what's best for each other."

Dream turns back to what he's doing, and George feels *so frustrated*.

"Aren't you sick of this place?" George asks, finally gathering up the courage to walk towards Dream's desk and take a glance at what he's doing.

He's drawing a bird. Its beak is crooked, and the wings are a little out of proportion to its body, but it's oddly endearing.

"No, George, I love it here, what would give you the impression that I would ever want to leave?" Dream sarcastically responds, digging his pencil into the eye of the dove.

George places a hand over his, gently pries the pencil from his hand. "You're going to rip the page."

He drops it on the desk, next to the page. "You like drawing?"

Dream shakes his head no. "No. Just bored."

"It's a nice bird," he tries.

Dream looks at him in disbelief, before cracking a smile. "It's awful."

George gets distracted for a moment, at the brilliant white of his teeth.

"It's not," he insists, pressing the end with the eraser to the tip of the beak, not hard enough to get rid of any of the lines. "This part is just a little— and the wings are just a little bit big, but the body's nice."

“The body’s nice,” Dream repeats. “I traced a flip-flop for that part, I didn’t even draw it.”

“Okay, but that’s creative,” George tries, and Dream laughs at him.

“His name’s George,” Dream points to the belly of the bird. “He’s a little fucked, but—”

“Hey!” George says it louder than he means to, and both of them fall silent for a moment, listening for footsteps up the staircase.

When nobody comes, he walks over to his side of the room, drags his chair next to Dream and sits down. “I can fix it, look.”

He thickens the line of the beak, drags it out so that it’s hooked instead of jagged. He adds two rough rows of feathers to the wingspan. Dream watches him, places his chin down on the desk as he observes the movements of the pencil. George glances down at him, and their eyes meet. Dream’s gaze softens, and the muscle in George’s chest squeezes painfully tight. He looks away before he thinks something stupid, swallows hard and shades the newest rows of feathers in so that the lines beneath it become less visible.

“D’you draw?” Dream asks in a whisper. “A lot?”

“I used to,” George whispers back. “Didn’t really have too much time for it in the past year. Probably won’t when I leave here, either.”

He remembers that he’s joining the seminary, that he’s promised his life to priesthood and a God he doesn’t even really think exists.

“You’re good,” Dream says after a moment. “Better than me.”

“I think most people are better than you, Dream,” George mutters under his breath.

Dream lets out a noise of indignation. “I can do that too. Watch.”

George hands him the pencil and pushes the page towards him. He watches as Dream leans forward, begins to draw over the lines George had bolded, frowning in concentration. When he finishes, he sits up and grins.

“I fixed it,” he says.

“You didn’t fix anything,” George responds, crossing his arms over his chest.

Dream laughs again, features melting from gaunt and harrowed into something golden and boyish, and George wants to keep him like this forever. They sit in silence for a moment, Dream smudging some of the graphite in an attempt to blend in the shading of the feathers, and George watches him.

“I’m sorry,” Dream finally says, quietly. “For assuming all those things about you the first night. I just— I don’t know.”

George can tell he wants to say something, but he doesn’t push.

“It’s fine,” he reassures him. “I was wrong about you too, so I guess we’re even.”

Dream nods. “Even.”

It is a breath of air after being stuck underwater for what felt like centuries. Every other interaction he’s had with everyone here felt stiff, rehearsed and meant to convince him of something. At least

he knows with Dream, there isn't any ulterior motive.

"Are you going to be staying for the next session as well?" Dream asks him. "After these three months are over."

George shakes his head no. "I'm going to the seminary."

Dream's expression hardens. "Oh."

"I have to," George starts, but Dream holds up a hand.

"It's okay," he says. "You don't have to explain yourself to me."

I want to, George thinks desperately, but he lets it die in his mind before he makes something unrealistic out of it.

"I was here for a year when I was fourteen," Dream starts. "Then I went home."

George thinks he's hearing things, but then he looks at Dream, who's looking back at him.

"When'd you come back?"

"A year and a half ago," Dream says, nonchalantly. "Haven't been home since."

It doesn't match up with what he's heard. George chooses to stay silent, motions for Dream to continue,

"Everyone here talks about me like I'm some sort of ghost story," Dream starts, and George watches as he clenches his fists. "Like I'm some sort of experiment they keep in the walls."

"Does it bother you?"

Dream scoffs. "No."

George waits for a crack in his resolution, but Dream stands firm. "That's admirable."

He wishes he had that kind of courage. Instead, he's doing as he's been told to do. He's going to become a priest and lead Sunday mass, he's going to pretend he sees God, and that will have to be enough to let everyone believe he's going to heaven when he dies.

"Why are you going to the seminary George?" Dream asks, hands falling to his lap.

Because it's what I want. Because it's what I was called to do. Because it's my duty.

George shrugs, tongue suddenly made of cotton.

I want this, have always wanted this. That's how God has made me; a little guiltier than everyone else, and I've got one option to remedy it.

George looks at him, the sheet of the paper lying on the desk, then back to him. "I think it's what's best."

Dream nods, doesn't push further.

George hates thinking too hard about it, because when he does, he remembers that he doesn't have all the time in the world to push things off. In three months, his parents will have expected him to

have applied. In another few months, he should be accepted. This time next year, George will be on his way to priesthood. He's going to spend the rest of his life devoted to the church, and he's going to have to look at people that he sees himself in, and guide them to a salvation he doesn't even think exists.

He remembers hearing his mother and father talking through the walls, his father questioning where he possibly could have gotten the *idea* planted in his head that he liked boys, while his mother frantically urged for his father to find a way to fix it, fix him. She had been so afraid that George would somehow topple over with his injuries and die, damning himself to eternal hellfire because he hadn't taken the time to properly repent while he was still in the world.

George wonders what compels them to believe.

George glances around the room, and his eyes land on a particular section of the floorboards.

"George?" Dream speaks again, seemingly reading his mind. "I need you to not touch that."

"I know," George sighs. "I haven't."

"It's for your own good," Dream starts, and George bites back the anger rising in his throat, because coming here was for his own good, and perhaps getting attacked was for his own good too, because it lead to his parents finding out that he was abnormal. The seminary is for his own good, so he doesn't end up like the rest of them, so he doesn't have to lie to one woman at the altar, but lie to hundreds of people every Sunday instead.

"Okay," he finishes blankly.

He's not going to pry, despite his curiosity, because he doesn't want Dream to hate him.

"It'll get you in trouble," Dream continues.

"I won't touch it," George holds a hand over his heart. "I get it."

Dream looks thankful, and the anger simmers down just a little. It isn't Dream's fault George's life is going to shit, that everything in the future looks bleak and mundane and uninteresting. George wonders on occasion, if he would be happier if he had just laid there and died.

Dream has been stuck here, lonely for years seemingly, and George doesn't need to add onto his laundry list of problems.

He's snuck into this place under the guise that he is someone good, someone deserving. If everyone were to find out the truth, see that he's more horrible and far gone than all of them, he wonders if he would be shown the same kindness.

He thinks of Dream, who's alone, everywhere he goes.

Chapter End Notes

hi!! ok so u may have noticed but there's a poem at the beginning of every chapter - i added them in after tweeting about chapter 4 going up though so it is very possible to have missed them. i am sorry i was supposed to do that from chapter 1 i had them organized in this table and everything but i forgot i considered gaslighting eve

into thinking they were always there but i decided not to.

hope u all enjoyed the chapter <3 tysm for all the lovely comments on the last one i read them all

would love to know ur thoughts in the comments as always, tysm for readingggg see u in the next one :)

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spillway

Chapter Summary

There is a loneliness in this world so great
That you can see it in the slow movements of
The hands of a clock

People so tired
Mutilated
By love or no love.

People just are not good to each other
One on one.

- Charles Bukowski, Love Is a Dog From Hell

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George finds the morning prayer impossible.

Maybe it's because they have to stand. It feels excruciatingly long, and sometimes he feels like the bones in his legs will snap without warning in an attempt to feel some sort of relief. Every pair of eyes he meets stares right through him, and every word he speaks that he does not mean is being etched into stone, will come back to haunt him once they figure out that he's a fraud.

Every day, he waits for the roof to collapse and for the ocean to fall from the sky, swallow them whole and damn them all to hell. God will tell them that one of them has doomed them all, and then heads will turn towards him, and everyone will know that George is not as faithful as he proclaims himself to be.

The evening prayer is more bearable. They're usually sitting while it happens. He can close his eyes and clasp his hands and pretend, and doesn't have to feel the weight of all the eyes on him.

He brings it up to Dream.

"Do you ever feel like someone is watching you?"

Dream rolls over to look at him. "Well, yeah, but it's probably just Sister Catherine."

"I mean like, really watching you, trying to see if you'll step out of line and then they'll catch you doing something you aren't supposed to be doing," George explains.

Dream stares blankly. "Yes, that's kind of the whole point of this hellhole."

"I don't know if I'd describe it as a hellhole," George tries. "It's just— I don't know. I feel like something bad is going to happen all the time."

Dream gets onto his stomach, props himself up with his elbows. "Like what kind of bad? Get in

trouble? They won't do anything to you, just maybe make you eat dinner in your room."

"I feel like everything's going to blow up," George says the words quickly so he doesn't have to keep them inside of his head any longer.

It's a bad idea. Now everything feels louder, more violent and tangible and real. Dream keeps staring at him like he can see right through him, and it makes George feel some sort of abstract emotion, a cross between insignificant and nervous.

"George," Dream starts, and George wants to tell him to forget it, that he's just having a bad day because he has a headache. "Do you really want to go to the seminary?"

The words land in his chest the same way a claw of a hammer would. It's not something that's up for discussion, not something he can get out of doing, so debating his invisible options is not something he needs to torture himself with.

"I don't see what this has to do with anything," George says. "Forget it— it's fine. I have a migraine, I need to take a nap."

"I don't think you want to go," Dream disregards his words, and George wishes for the first time that he would shut up. "So why are you going?"

"I have to go, Dream, it's my calling," George says through gritted teeth, hoping that it is enough for Dream to drop the subject, move on. "It's not up for debate."

"What would you do if you weren't going to the seminary?" Dream asks, swinging his legs back and forth, once, twice, before stopping.

"I would be unhappy," George finishes, stripping off his cardigan and climbing into his own bed. He pulls the covers over his head, closes his eyes.

"You're not happy now," Dream points out. "You have to be around God all day, and you just seem like you can't stand that guy."

"He's not—you can't call Him *that guy*, Dream, He's *God*."

"Do you think he's the one watching you?"

George finally pokes his head up from underneath the blanket, but opts to stare at the ceiling instead of looking at Dream. There isn't a point in lying to him.

"No."

"You don't even think God exists."

George pauses. "No."

"Why are you so worried about what he thinks if you don't think he's real?"

"I'm not worried about what He thinks." It sounds so simple when Dream says it like that. "I don't know what I'm worried about."

It would be such a waste of time to learn God wasn't real. George thinks that if he were to die today, at the very least he would be granted some sort of leniency considering he hadn't strayed too far from what he was supposed to be doing. He'd had the decency to lie about his faith instead of spitting on some holy name. His mind has been replaced with an artificial sinkhole, taking rational

thoughts and warping them into hypotheticals so ridiculous that even he doesn't believe himself, and yet he still doesn't have the courage to abandon these second hand beliefs.

If Dream suspects George isn't happy about going to the seminary, he wouldn't be incorrect. But it doesn't matter what Dream suspects, because when these three months are over, George will go home, and Dream will stay here, and they'll never see each other again.

"What are you going to do when you leave here?" George asks, turning onto his side to look at Dream.

The question visibly takes him aback. George watches his gaze harden, his jaw shift as his fingers tense. The tightness dissolves after a moment, and then Dream speaks.

"I don't know."

George doesn't know how he's supposed to respond to that. "I'm sure you'll figure something out."

Dream is thinking now, eyebrows furrowed as his bottom lip disappears underneath the top one. George wishes he could, just once, take a look inside and understand what it is that makes him work the way he does.

"You feel like someone's watching you," Dream says, and George tries not to look too disappointed about the fact they're talking about him again.

"It's probably just the priest," George brushes it off.

"Maybe it's a ghost," Dream says, grinning at George from ear to ear.

He looks tired today. George is only noticing now, but his under eyes have gotten even thinner. It reminds him of the film he used to pull out of old cassette tapes, of the wings of the butterflies that sit on the marigolds in the garden at home.

"A ghost," George parrots.

"You don't believe in ghosts?" Dream asks, tilting his head as he drops his chin from his palms to the mattress.

"You believe in ghosts?" George counters.

Dream thinks about this for a moment, biting down on his chapped bottom lip again. "It's complicated."

"Explain it to me."

Dream looks at him the same way he did when George first arrived here. Guarded. George practically curses under his breath.

"I want to know," George tries, crossing his fingers underneath the blankets for good luck.

"I don't actually believe in ghosts," Dream starts, picking at the dirt underneath his thumb with his index finger. "I just— my mom's brother died when she was really young," he pauses to look up at George, and then looks back to his hands. "He would've had kids that I would have probably grown up with. But they're not real, because he's dead."

George swallows hard, tries to follow along.

“There’s an old man that lived down the street here,” Dream continues. “You wouldn’t know, but during the summer sessions he’d come and sit with the priests during mass. He used to bake brownies sometimes during the winter and bring them in, and he had a wife. I heard him talking to one of them once, and he was telling them his wife hung herself nine months after they got married.”

George winces, pressing the cold tips of his fingers to the back of his neck.

“They found out she couldn’t get pregnant,” Dream shivers. “Said she took it too hard, kept digging her finger into her stomach and calling her womb a graveyard.”

George casts his eyes towards the floor, can’t stop his eyes from involuntarily tearing up. “Fuck.”

“Dead things go somewhere,” Dream says with certainty.

“You think they stay here?”

“Not really,” Dream answers. “I don’t think the afterlife is real. Sorry, I know you’re really dreading Hell, and dedicating your life to making sure you don’t get in, even though you don’t think the guy who manages it is real.”

George feels like the air has been punched from his lungs. “Fuck you.”

Dream looks at him. “C’mon, I don’t mean it like that. I’m just saying what you’ve told me out loud, so maybe it’ll make sense to me too.”

“What does any of this have to do with ghosts?” George snaps, now regretting his decision to start this conversation in the first place.

“I’m saying people die,” Dream continues, rolling his eyes at him. “I’m saying that what’s left of them isn’t going anywhere after this. This is all we’ve got.”

“So you think everyone turns into a ghost?” George asks, crossing his arms as he sits up.

“I’m saying everything you are is going to be left here. Everything that you could have been, everything you weren’t, everything you were and wanted and had and didn’t have.”

“You’re saying nonsense,” George accuses. “You don’t believe in ghosts. You’re making fun of me.”

“I’m not,” Dream repeats, indifferently. “I’m saying we both don’t believe in God, and I’m saying that everything you are is going to be gone one day, and nobody’s going to care whether you loved God or hated God, nobody’s going to care that you were here at all.”

George waits for him to continue. Dream hesitates, like the last thing he wants to say is the most difficult part of this delusional word vomit with no real conclusion. He doesn’t think there’s any combination of words that could make any of this serve a real purpose. Dream is wasting his time.

“I’m saying don’t go to the seminary,” Dream starts, and George has heard enough.

He sits up, untangles his legs from the duvet while hot embarrassment sits in his stomach. “Fuck off. They were right about you.”

He doesn’t need Dream telling him what’s good for him and what isn’t, making up uncles and ghost cousins and imaginary women with graveyard wombs. He feels like a fool for even thinking

that he would give him some sort of straight answer.

“George,” Dream starts, holding out a hand. “I didn’t mean to offend you. Really.”

“I told you to stop talking about the seminary, but you just don’t listen,” George starts, desperately hoping that the frustrated tears in his eyes won’t spill onto his cheeks. “I told you it’s none of your business. After these three months are over, I’m going to go back— Stop, *don’t touch me or I’ll fucking call Sister Catherine Dream*, don’t touch me— I’m going to find God again, and I don’t need you to—”

“You’re not happy,” Dream whispers. “You’re miserable. I can tell, because I’m miserable and you’re starting to look like me. You don’t like it here, and you can lie to yourself, but you’re not fooling me—”

“I don’t need to fool you,” George spits the words out like they’re made of venom, and he wishes Dream would back down and stop talking. “I don’t need to fool anyone.”

“You can get out of here and be happy,” Dream tries again, desperation heavy in his voice. “You don’t have to pretend to be something you’re not.”

“You are being ridiculous,” George says, stepping backwards towards the door. “You barely know me, and I am confident you don’t know me enough to know what’s best for me.”

“I’m saying that—”

George swings the door open. “What?”

Dream stops speaking, looks at George, and the door, expression nothing short of betrayed. George would feel bad for him, but the anger is too hot, and he’s too volatile, and he doesn’t trust himself to speak at this moment anymore.

“I’m leaving,” George tells him. “And when I come back, we’re never talking about the seminary again.”

Dream glares at him, before going back to his bed, and George shuts the door before he can see him fall into the covers.

He’s stupid for thinking he could befriend someone who so clearly doesn’t want to be helped, stupid for thinking that anyone could understand what is at stake if he doesn’t go. George loses everything if he doesn’t; his mother, his father, a roof over his head and food in his belly. Dream might not have plans for the future, and George’s plans might not necessarily be what he wants, but it doesn’t matter, because it’s not his life.

He can’t believe the audacity of him.

George ends up in the kitchens, where Sister Catherine, another woman, and two of the priests are sitting at a table and playing cards. When one of them sees him, they wave him over.

“George!” Sister Catherine calls out to him, grinning widely. “How’re you today?”

He doesn’t see a point in lying to her. “I’ve been better.”

She frowns at that, shifts her chair over while one of the priests grabs a chair from the table next to them, and sets it down in the empty spot. “Come sit.”

They don't ask him any questions, just deal him seven cards. Sister Catherine begins to explain the game to him and he nods along, half paying attention and half hoping that he is able to figure the rest of the game out as they continue.

Once he gets the hang of it, he begins to enjoy himself. They've been playing for upwards of forty five minutes when a group of boys enter through the doorway, talking loudly. George recognises David when he pulls his hood down, and waves at him.

When mealtime rolls around, George looks around for Dream so he knows to avoid him, but he's nowhere to be found. He wonders if he's gotten in trouble for all the noise they were making upstairs, and guilt sits heavy in his stomach. When they roll out the dessert cart, George takes four cookies and two extra napkins, and looks left and right before wrapping them up and sneaking them into the pocket of his cardigan.

"You've been alright, George?" David asks him.

George nods. "Yeah."

David looks around, before leaning in close. "Can I ask you a question, George?"

"Yeah," George tells him. "What's going on?"

David looks around a second time, checking to make sure Sister Catherine is preoccupied before he speaks. "Do you know anything new about Dream?"

George is taken aback. "What?"

"Oh come on, you can't blame me for being curious as to what it's like living with that freak," David scoffs. "He never talks to anyone, has done nothing but cause trouble, and you're still living with him. There's an empty room down beside mine they could put you in, and all you would have to do is ask."

George raises his eyebrows in surprise. "What?"

"You didn't know?" David asks. "There's an empty room. Down the hall from mine. You should ask for it."

"I didn't know that," George says, frustrated. "They told me that this was all the space they had."

"You should speak to someone," David insists. "I worry for you, and your safety."

George doesn't think there's a single thing that's occurred inside of Jericho that has given him even the slightest bit of clarity as to what was going on. From how loose the staff acted with him, versus how little everyone here seemed to like it, to his housing situation, and Dream's sudden investment in his hopes and aspirations.

When he gets upstairs, Dream is lying in bed, and George is relieved to see two dirty dishes stacked on top of each other on his desk.

"Did you get to eat enough?" George asks, quietly, and Dream's head moves to look at him.

"I did," Dream answers shortly, before turning onto his side so his back is to George.

"Good," George says, uncertain of what to do. "I got these for you, in case."

Dream turns over, looking unimpressed. He feels stupid, pulling the crumpled up napkin from his

pocket underneath Dream's scornful gaze, still very unhappy with him from the morning.

"I don't need you to take care of me," Dream says, rolling back over.

George bits his tongue, chooses not to further irritate the issue. He changes before climbing into his own bed, pulling his father's Bible from his bedside table. It's dogeared on the first page of Proverbs, and he tries his best to read, but his mind wanders elsewhere.

Dream is right, no matter how upset it makes George. Dream is the only one who could possibly understand what it was like to know that there was nothing once all this is over, and the only one who knows that for him, this is all there is.

He's hurt. He didn't have to be made a fool of, treated like a child and have to be tricked into accepting what he already knows. George doesn't want to think about how the seminary is going to treat him, how he's going to mould himself to fit inside what he needs to become and successfully go about the rest of his life.

He lets himself indulge, just this once, in a future that he would look forward to living in. He thinks of a painter's studio in the attic, and a dog running around in the field behind his house. He thinks of arms wrapped around his torso, hands splayed over his stomach, chapped lips by the skin underneath his ear in the morning. He's waking up, slipping into bedroom slippers, walking over to the bathroom to brush his teeth.

He reaches out in the air in front of him, pretends he's grabbing a toothbrush, looks up into the mirror and looks into the eyes of his reflection.

There is a blank space where his heart should be, a chasm instead of his own eyes. He blinks extra hard, once, twice, and then he squeezes his eyes again before he opens them. He turns his head towards the window, relieved that there is some sort of source of light in this room. He closes his eyes again, shakes off the weird feeling forming in his stomach.

The darkness swallows him whole.

Chapter End Notes

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tysm for reading!! would love to know your thoughts in the comments as always, see you in the next one :)

nectarine juice

Chapter Summary

What is it about vulnerability that can make the hand draw back, sometimes, and can sometimes seem the catalyst for rendering the hand into sheer force, destructive? *Don't you see how you've burnt almost all of it, all the tenderness, away*, someone screams to someone else, in public — and looking elsewhere, we walk quickly past, as if even to have heard that much might have put us at risk of whatever fate questions like that spring from.

- Carl Phillips, Monomoy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He is selfish.

The revelation comes along with the sunlight filtering in through the blinds. George shivers underneath the duvet as a stabbing pain lodges itself in between his ribs. He sits up and groans, rubs his eyes in an attempt to get rid of the fog in his eyes, hears the other bed frame creak. He can't face Dream, not right now. He chooses to head to their shared bathroom, closing the door behind him.

He stares at his reflection, tries to recognise himself. He runs the tap and closes his eyes, bites back the bile burning at his throat. He's disgusted with himself. He winces as he remembers what he had said yesterday, and the guilt in his stomach only gets heavier when he's reminded that all Dream wanted to do was help.

George didn't want to talk about the seminary. He doesn't even want to think about the seminary most days, opting to push it to the very back corners of his mind whenever he's given the opportunity. He isn't sure how he expected Dream to know that. When he opens the door to enter back into their room, he can't even bear to look at him. Something shuffles behind him, but he doesn't dare look, instead turning towards the door and slipping on a pair of shoes, closing it behind him as he heads to the chapel.

It's empty at this hour, to his surprise. His footsteps echo as he walks down the aisle, towards the cross. He stares up at the tapestries for a moment, before hesitantly bringing himself to his knees. Nobody is watching him, he tries to remember. This is for him.

He doesn't know what he's doing.

His chest trembles, so he raises both his hands up in an attempt to ground himself, to find some sort of divine guidance, offers himself as a sorry excuse of a vessel to something greater. *This is it*, he tries. *This is your chance. Strike me with something, anything.*

He wants to be a believer. He wants all of this to go away, wants to go home and pretend the incident in the woods was a one off experience, a misjudgement and a mistake. Maybe God will take a chance on him, undo whatever it is that has lobotomized his brain and made him incapable

of believing.

What makes him feel like a fool is the conviction he tells it to himself with, like he is somebody God would choose to bestow some great gift upon, like George was somebody who had managed to do enough good to deserve something like prophethood. Even if George was a believer, he doesn't think he would be anywhere near good enough for that.

He isn't a saint. He's a liar on his knees, in some cold empty room, bowing down to a ghost he doesn't even believe in, trying to be saved from something that he doesn't think exists. He holds his arms up until they burn, keeps his eyes closed so he doesn't have to see the dozens of people he's sure are filing into the room, who are sure to think he's gone mad when they see him.

When he finally drops his hands to his sides and opens his eyes, he sees that he is just as alone as when he walked in.

The steps back up to the attic feel heavy with shame. When he arrives, Dream is sitting on the corner of George's bed, looking distraught, and George feels awful all over again.

"Dream," he starts, but Dream shakes his head no.

He hesitantly takes a step forward, wonders if today is the day the universe decides that it's time for him to catch up with his karma.

"I'm sorry," Dream says it first, staring down at the floor. "I'm so sorry, George."

George sits down next to him and places a hand on his shoulder. "Hey, it's not—"

Dream turns his head to look at him, wide, sleepless eyes. "No, I didn't— it wasn't my place. I'm sorry for yesterday."

"I shouldn't have lashed out at you," George insists, and Dream glances at the hand that's on his shoulder.

Before George can withdraw it, Dream places his own hand over it. "It's okay, I kind of deserved it."

"You didn't," George says, heart sinking. "I just— I wouldn't ever— I know you don't like the staff here, I shouldn't have threatened to call them."

Dream thinks about it for a moment. "Would you have?"

George doesn't remember thinking, just remembers blind anger and gritting his teeth, spitting out whatever he could to get the last word. "No."

A beat. "So you didn't— so you lied, right?"

"Yes."

"So you didn't mean it? Any of it?"

George shifts so he can look at him better. Dream is staring intently, leg bouncing up and down as he waits for an answer.

"No," George confirms. "I didn't."

Dream looks visibly relieved. "Okay."

He can't believe he's done this to him. He would have hoped that at the very least, he would still be a good person when he stopped fearing the wrath of the all-powerful, but it turns out that he can't even get that right. He wishes he could take it back.

"George," Dream repeats his name, sensing some sort of still existent turmoil as he shifts closer to him. "I'm sorry. Please don't— I shouldn't have brought it up after you told me not to, I just— I don't know, I haven't really had anyone here that I've really gotten close to making friends with, and I pushed it too far."

"It's okay, Dream," George tells him as he wraps his arms around himself, guilty, guilty, guilty.

"I don't think you're as stupid as everyone else here," Dream admits after a second. "I wish I could take back what I said to you when you first got here."

George remembers how they spoke to each other when they'd first met. "I thought you thought I was just as bad."

Dream thinks for a moment, and George watches his throat shift as he swallows hard before speaking. "That was before. You didn't have to take care of me. You did though."

A moment in silence.

"I only think you're half as stupid now," Dream offers in an attempt to pull a laugh from him.

George exhales loudly, tries to force the corners of his mouth upwards into something that resembles a smile. Dream nudges him with his elbow.

"I'm sorry."

The bed vibrates, and George sees that Dream is shaking. George thinks out of all the horrible things he's done, putting Dream, who very clearly has a lot of his own shit that he's trying to deal with, through more stress than he needs to, is one of the worst. He reaches out a hand, places it on Dream's thigh.

"It's okay," George reassures him. "I'm not mad at you."

"Did you mean it?"

George watches his chin wobble dangerously. "I didn't mean any of it."

"I need to know you didn't mean this, specifically," Dream insists, voice cracking in the middle of the sentence. "I just need to hear you say it."

"Mean what?" George asks softly, eyes wandering to a stray blond strand of hair stuck to his forehead.

"When you said they were right about— when you said they were right about me," Dream's voice decrescendos at the end of the sentence, and something inside of him seems to snap, because he slumps over.

George lurks forward to grab him, drags him onto the bed in an attempt to stabilise him. Panic surges through his veins as Dream trembles in his arms, tears budding in his eyes as his cheeks flush red.

"Dream," George says desperately, as Dream reaches out for him with two hands, before flinching backwards. "Dream, what's— talk to me, what's— what's happening?"

Dream shakes his head no, gasps out for air as he reaches for George again, before seemingly remembering something and drawing back into himself.

Finally, George manages to gather himself enough to be useful. He reaches around for Dream, takes both of his wrists in his hands as he pulls him forward, on top of him. He ends up landing on his back, but Dream ends up on his chest, struggling against his hold. George lets go of him as quickly as he can, before placing a hand on his back, rubbing circles over the damp back of his shirt.

“Just breathe,” he offers. “You’re gonna be alright, just—”

Dream gasps out for air, tears still escaping his eyes steadily, and George wants to reach out and wipe them from his cheeks, but isn’t sure if he can touch. He opts to just place his other hand on the back of Dream’s head, smoothing over his hair in a way that he hopes is helpful.

“I’m—I’m not that,” Dream struggles to say. “I’m not like what say I’m like, George, I promise.”

George’s heart aches as he thinks of Dream, sitting alone at every table, followed by hushed whispers and wide eyes, met with silence when he steps within hearing range.

“I don’t think you’re like that,” George tries to console him. “I’m sorry, I didn’t—I shouldn’t have said it.”

“I’m not,” Dream repeats.

“You’re not,” George agrees with him, finally finding the courage to hold onto Dream a little tighter. “You’re not, I promise.”

“Please believe me,” Dream asks, the desperation in his voice so heavy that George feels like he might collapse.

This isn’t about him, though. He feels Dream’s heart beating in his chest against his own, holds Dream until he finally stops shaking and manages to sit up on his own.

“I want to show you something,” Dream finally whispers into the room. “But you can’t—you can’t tell anyone.”

“You don’t have to,” George tells him, speaking quietly. “It’s—I am genuinely sorry, Dream. I didn’t mean to make you feel bad. Well—I didn’t—I was angry, but it wasn’t fair to—”

“I need you to know,” Dream cuts him off. “I need to tell someone. I feel like I’m going crazy in this room, and maybe it would be easier to deal with if you were just an insufferable douchebag who thought he was better than everyone else,” he pauses, gaze softening. “But you’re—I don’t know. I haven’t figured you out yet.”

George isn’t sure what to say to that. He was hopeful he had managed to succeed in this judgement, somehow.

“It’s not bad,” Dream rushes out to say, heat rising to his cheeks again. “I just—I don’t know. I don’t know how I’m supposed to feel about you.”

“I’ve heard there’s another room that’s opened up,” George offers. “If you’d like, I can go ask about it. You won’t have to see me anymore.”

Dream, surprisingly, appears crestfallen at this news. “You want to go?”

George hesitates. On one hand, it would serve to give both of them some privacy. It would let George room next to the other boys, who seemed to enjoy his company well enough. It would also get people to stop badgering him about what it was like to live with Dream, which also was a positive development. Still, he hesitates. He isn't sure if he's in the best frame of mind, if he's fit to be left alone at night and be trusted not to burst into tears every moment he gets.

"I'll go if you want me gone."

Dream closes his eyes for a moment and reopens them, before looking at George the same soft way. "I don't want you gone."

George watches as he clenches his fists while he speaks, before untensing his arms, then his shoulders. "Then I don't want to be gone."

The atmosphere in the room seems to visibly become more comfortable. Dream breathes a sigh of relief, and George wonders if he feels the same loneliness, being stuck up here all the time. Come to think of it, George doesn't think he's seen Dream outside at all.

Finally, Dream stands. He moves from the bed and stumbles over to the floor, before slowly sitting himself down. He motions for George to come sit with him. George complies silently, heart beating loudly in his chest in anticipation.

"If you press down on this corner hard enough—" Dream starts, before glancing over at the door nervously. "Can you go lock that, actually?"

George gets up, fingers trembling as he twists the door shut, shaking the handle to ensure that it's in place. He walks back over and sits back down. Dream presses his thumb into the corner of the board, and shakes it. George holds his breath as something shifts. Dream looks at him sheepishly.

"You can't laugh, okay?"

George nods vigorously. "Promise."

Dream pushes down on the edge of the panel that's adjacent to the corner he's been fiddling with, and it slides off.

"You can get it to slide back on really easily if you use the leg of the bed like a hammer," Dream tells him. "You only have to move it once, over the corner, and it fits back perfectly."

George doubts he's going to get the clearance to be visiting whatever is down here frequently, but he nods again anyway. Dream swallows hard, before removing the thin layer of plywood guarding the contents underneath.

George leans forward to get a better look.

Inside the crevice in the floor, there is a book, surrounded by rows and rows of folded paper.

"Take one," Dream whispers. "A piece of paper. Any of them."

George, despite his confusion, complies, opting to pull one that is sticking out a little further than the others from the collection. "Is this a magic trick?"

Dream exhales sharply, offering George a crooked smile. "Not really."

George hands the paper off to Dream, unsure what to do with it exactly.

“You can open it,” Dream tells him. “It’s— you can’t tell anyone that I have this, though. I might get in trouble.” He pauses to think. “More than I already do.”

With jittery fingers, George unfolds the paper from eighths to fourths to halves. There are lines in blue ink hastily scribbled across the page. He reads it in his head, mouth moving to form the outlines of the words but no sound managing to escape.

And all men kill the thing they love,

By all let this be heard,

Some do it with a bitter look,

Some with a flattering word,

The coward does it with a kiss,

The brave man with a sword.

He looks up at Dream for an explanation.

“It’s Oscar Wilde,” Dream whispers. “It’s from The Ballad of Reading Gaol.”

When George doesn’t seem to recognise it, he doesn’t seem to get discouraged. “Have you heard of it?”

George shakes his head no again, reaches out to give the paper to Dream. “What is it?”

“It’s a poem,” Dream tells him. “Well— that’s just a part of it. The whole thing is a lot longer.”

George nods, tries to follow along. “So all of these...”

“I know it looks stupid,” Dream starts, but George shakes his head no.

“It’s not stupid,” he insists.

Dream smiles gratefully before continuing. “It’s just— we aren’t really supposed to bring in books, or anything, without telling anyone. And these— I’m not supposed to have them, but I can’t— I need something in here that’ll keep me from going insane.”

Poems. Dream collects poems and keeps them underneath the floorboards. George imagines he had a lot more time to himself before he got here.

Dream whips his head in the direction of the windows, before looking back at George. “I collect them. Poems.”

“You collect them,” George echoes. “Where do you get them from?”

Dream avoids his eyes. “Sometimes they take us down to the library, and we’re allowed in only one of the sections, but I snuck a few other ones in. When they’re not looking, I tear out the pages of the ones I like.”

George nods again, tries to understand. "I'm sure if you told them, they'd let you read them."

Dream looks at him like he's crazy. "You think Sister Catherine, fuck, nevermind her— you think *anyone* in there is going to let me read Oscar Wilde?"

George looks at him with uncertainty. "I don't know." Maybe he's just not getting it. "I don't—they don't let you read poems."

"No," Dream repeats, eyes looking over the page that George has handed him.

He watches Dream drink in the words again, pupils dark and hands gripping the paper like it'll disintegrate if he doesn't.

"It's a nice poem," George offers.

"I've been doing it since— since my first stay here," Dream admits. "I had to burn the pages I did collect when it was time for me to go home, but I'd read them over so many times that I had them memorised." He pauses. "Not all of these, anymore. But the first few. I just wrote them out when I got back."

His mouth tastes sour as he watches Dream scan over the page one final time, before folding and slipping it back into its spot.

"You probably don't care," Dream continues. "It's not— sorry, George."

George wants to remove that word from his vocabulary, have back the version of him that he met on his first day here. Cocky and brash, loud and self assured. Anything but this.

"No, don't be," George rushes out to say, placing a hand on Dream's shoulder.

He can feel him tense for a moment, before he leans in so that they're sitting closer, legs pressed together. The touch feels hot, even through the fabric of his pants, and George doesn't let himself think too hard about it.

"I won't tell," George assures him. "It's lovely. That you have this."

"I was terrified you'd end up finding them," Dream confesses. "The floorboard is pretty difficult to undo."

"I wouldn't have guessed this, if I'm being honest," George tells him.

He watches as Dream's tongue darts out to lick over his lips, before he smiles, corners of his eyes crinkling. The sun shifts somewhere in the sky, and golden light peaks through the cracks of the curtains. Before George can really stop himself, he's reaching out, pressing his thumb against the tip of Dream's nose. Dream laughs as he moves backwards, and George sees the years melt off of him in the fraction of a moment.

"What're you doing?" Dream asks, tilting his head in amusement as the sun hits the top of his head.

He looks better like this; more boyish and less ashen, alive and happy and well. George shakes his head, watches as Dream rolls his eyes. George pushes his hair behind his eyes, before gesturing towards the gap in the floor.

"Can I read another one?"

He's lucky to look up fast enough to watch Dream blossom all over again, grinning with his teeth

on show as he nods enthusiastically, once, twice, and once more for good measure.

Chapter End Notes

sorry to the curiouscat anon that guessed there was a little gerbil named patch underneath the floorboard your idea was wayy better than mine. seriously u outsold!!! hope you all enjoyed the chapter!! would love to know ur thoughts in the comments, see u in the next one, love u miss u see u soon

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four walls

Chapter Summary

But then what of me remains here? A sense of tiredness. I was always tired. There was never a time where I was not tired. Not when life had its claws in me and not when I escaped from it. I did not live with intent, I only lived.

- Miri Yu, Tokyo Ueno Station

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

One of the lightbulbs in their room is dimmer than the other. There is a leg on Dream's desk that wobbles whenever he presses down on the corner close to it. George's bed creaks louder when he turns to his left than his right.

He's been good, still. He's gone to all the voluntary masses as well as the mandatory ones. He'll answer one question near the end of the session every day, two on Thursdays. He can't be bothered to iron his uniform, but he learns that if he folds his clothes while they're still warm from the dryer, he doesn't need to. He keeps up with the scripture exercises, reads one day ahead on the weekends so that he can zone out a little on Monday.

There is a guest speaker standing at the front of the room. He's talking about how he was in his fourth year of college, studying pharmacology, when he felt a calling towards the ministry. George has heard so many stories about people finding the moment where they know that God is calling them that he feels like his head is going to fall off his shoulders and roll across the floor of the aisle. It doesn't seem to make more sense through repetition.

Still, he does what he needs to.

He's afraid that people can feel him withdrawing. Thomas and David don't seem to notice, but they've always been a little more involved with themselves than they are with George. To their credit, they're trying. George just doesn't really care to listen, because he doesn't get what they're talking about.

"I think you'd like this one," Dream opens with in the evenings, when the two of them sit in silence.

Dream will be sorting through his collection. George stares at the back of the postcards, at the grey walls and the ceiling, and tries to find words to write to his mother and father with. He can't find any. He doesn't bother to open his father's Bible. He's sifted through all of the pages, and none of them smell like the living room anymore.

"Read it out loud to me," George will say, and he'll close his eyes and put his head down on the desk.

Dream will whisper the words.

Sometimes, he'll hand the page over to George, for him to take a look at, before tucking it back

into its spot under the floorboards.

“I was so terrified that you’d find it,” Dream admits. “They’d figure out it was me who did it, in a heartbeat.”

“Have they ever caught you?” George asks, flipping through the post cards again.

“No,” Dream scoffs. “Not for this.”

He finds himself looking through the floorboards, once, when Dream is out on a group activity downstairs. He feels guilty, like he’s intruding on some sort of private practice, even though Dream said he was more than welcome to. His hands shake as he pulls one out of the stack, and he closes his eyes for a moment, inhales and exhales before reopening them.

He can’t do it. He sits on the floor and waits for Dream to return. An itching feeling begins to settle into his bones, an impatience that he hasn’t felt for a long while simmering inside of him. His stomach ties itself into knots and undoes them, once, twice, again and again and again and again. His leg shakes violently fast as he stares at the doorknob, waits for Dream to turn it slow and walk back in.

Time moves slowly, before finally, the sound of the knob turning releases the tension from George’s shoulders. He’s gotten so bad at being alone, but he doesn’t dwell heavy on it, just watches eagerly for Dream’s frame to make its way inside.

When he closes the door and turns to smile at George, soft and tired, and George stands immediately to hand him the page.

“Hello,” Dream tells him as he kicks off his shoes, unwraps a grey scarf from around his shoulders and tosses it to his desk. “What’s this for?”

George feels like he’s shrinking inside of himself as Dream’s eyes scan over the page. It feels stupid, now.

“George?” Dream prompts him again, moving closer to put a hand to the small of his back, walking them both towards his bed.

George pretends that Dream doesn’t have gunpowder stored in the tips of his fingers, like he doesn’t send violent sparks of something he doesn’t want to think about shooting through his veins when he’s gentle with him.

The thought is so visceral, so explosive and intense but short, that it surprises George when he thinks it. The sudden violent urge to swallow Dream in with his eyes, mind, heart, mouth, dissolves into a quiet fondness. He hopes to God it stays that way. He looks to Dream, who’s sitting next to him, and buries the feeling down, down. If there’s anything he should have learned by this point, it is that he needs to learn to keep things to himself, not act out of emotion as much.

“Can you read it to me?” he asks.

Dream raises his eyebrows in surprise, before nodding slowly. His eyes work over the paper again, before he clears his throat and starts.

“See! I give myself to you, beloved! My words are little jars, for you to take and put upon a shelf.”

George closes his eyes, wonders if it would be too much to prop himself against Dream’s shoulder. He shifts closer. Dream clears his throat again, before continuing.

“Their shapes are quaint and beautiful,” he starts, before moving closer to George as well.

The bed creaks.

“And they have many pleasant colours and lusters, to recommend them. Also the scent from them fills the room, with sweetness of flowers and crushed grasses.”

“Are we allowed flowers here?” George mutters. “They said we can’t hang stuff on the walls.”

He closes the distance between them. They’re sitting pressed together. George waits for Dream to flinch away. When he doesn’t, he presses his forehead to his shoulder.

“I don’t know,” Dream breathes out.

“I’m tired,” George continues. “Wanna go to bed.”

Dream is silent.

“You can continue, sorry,” George tells him.

Tentatively, an arm wraps around his waist and pulls him in closer. He adjusts his legs so that he can slot into Dream’s side easier.

“When I shall have given you the last one, you will have the whole of me,” Dream reads, before pausing. “I remember taking this one. I tore it from a magazine.”

“A magazine,” George echoes. “Did you take the entire magazine?”

Dream shakes his head no. George feels his cheek brush against the top of his head. “Only this one.”

Silence hangs in the room. George wonders what he would do if he knew how George had managed to get himself landed here.

“Is that it?” George asks, moving to sit up again.

Dream snaps out of whatever trance he seems to have landed himself in, before opening his mouth to read the last line. *“But I shall be dead.”*

George closes his eyes, takes his spot back on Dream’s shoulder, breathes in and out, searches for something familiar.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you outside,” George tells him. “Aren’t you tired from being here all day?”

Dream shrugs. “Don’t really have a reason to go. It’s cold.”

“It can’t be good for you,” George continues. “You should come to town this weekend.”

Dream stiffens. “Maybe. I don’t really like the other guys here, so I steer clear.”

“They’re all terrified of you, don’t worry,” George tells him. “They’ll leave you alone.”

Dream is silent. George senses he’s made a mistake.

“I’m not terrified of you,” he offers. “And the rest of them are pretty boring anyways.”

Dream offers him a smile, but it's half hearted. "C'mere."

He pulls George closer to him, so that the two of them are sitting chest to chest. George closes his eyes, tries to fight off the wave of fatigue that washes over him.

"It's colder on my bed than it is on yours," George murmurs.

"You can sleep on my bed," Dream answers him easily. "Whenever you like."

George's heart pounds around in his chest. "It's alright, it's nice most of the time under the duvet. Just a lot warmer here."

"Let me know when you're cold," Dream ignores his response. "And you can sleep here."

A beat. "I'm cold."

Another. "Alright."

Before he knows it, Dream is unwrapping the two of them, and walking over to George's bed. He retrieves his duvet and his pillow.

"You don't have to do that," George starts to protest, but Dream hears none of it. He's tucked into bed firmly, four layers of blankets and crowded in by his own pillows while his head is still placed over the one that belongs to Dream.

"I'll leave you to rest," Dream tells him. "I think— I have one more session."

George's heart drops in disappointment as Dream walks back towards the door, and shuts off the lights.

"Sleep well, George," Dream tells him, before leaving.

George lets his eyes fall shut, moves his legs underneath the blankets in an attempt to get warmer. He's alone again. Him, the ceiling, four walls. A bed that doesn't creak.

It is just as cold on this side of the room.

George skips the weekend trip.

"This is the last one before Christmas," Sister Catherine reminds him. "If there's anything you would like to mail to your parents."

"My family likes to celebrate it a little later," George lies through his teeth. "My father works through Christmas."

Sister Catherine asks if there's anything he would like for her to buy for him, but he insists that he's alright. He watches through the window in their room as the bus pulls out of the driveway and onto the road. Dream is still asleep.

"Wake up," George whispers, creeping up to his bedside and placing a hand on his shoulder. "Dream, wake up."

Dream is still for a moment, before finally shifting onto his side in bed. He yawns, white teeth on display as he opens his eyes, clearly disoriented. “What’s going on?”

“Everyone is gone,” George tells him. “We’re going to go outside. On a walk.”

“Who?” Dream asks, and George saves the urge to roll his eyes.

“Us,” he confirms. “C’mon.”

“It’s still nine o’clock,” Dream reminds him as he stretches his back and rubs his eyes with his palms. “We should sleep in a little longer.”

“The sun is out,” George protests. “And nobody else is here. C’mon, please?”

When Dream doesn’t respond again, George moves to his wardrobe. He hesitates for a moment, contemplating whether or not Dream will be upset if he opens it and tosses his uniform at him. Luckily, he seems to get the hint, and George hears two feet come down on the hardwood.

“Give me twenty minutes,” Dream says, voice low and groggy. “I don’t understand why we can’t go later. Better yet, I don’t understand why we have to go outside at all. It’s cold, George.”

“I know,” George says. “But I’ve just never seen you outside.”

“I promise you that I’m the same,” Dream tells him, but he makes his way to the bathroom.

George sits on his own bed, eagerly waits for his return. He’s going crazy, trapped in here. He doesn’t know how Dream is so okay. Maybe the poems help. Having something to do would be nice. George wishes he cared about something, anything, enough to risk himself for.

He wonders what he would be doing if he hadn’t gone to the woods that day. His hands habitually make their way to the bottom of his ribcage. He runs a thumb over where the line of stitches has left a scar the size of a paperclip. If anyone were to see it and ask, George could easily lie about how he had obtained it.

Rode his bike too fast, fell off the side of the road, got impaled by a tree branch. Anything is a better explanation than went looking for love in the fucking forest, was met with someone who wanted to see him dead. He hadn’t seen that kind of rage in anyone.

He thinks the disappointment in his mother’s eyes had hurt more than the punch to his temple.

He wonders if his parents think about him, if the house feels quieter. He wonders if they feel as though they’ve made a mistake, shipping off their otherwise perfect son to a place packed full with criminals, if not under the law, then at least under the eyes of God.

George almost laughs out loud at the irony. He is both.

He swallows it down when he hears the bathroom door click, and Dream emerges, dressed in a sweater and jeans. He’s scowling.

“We should stay in,” Dream tries again. “Or, I should stay in. You should go out, and then come back, and I’ll have the whole room warmed up for you.”

“Don’t be an idiot,” George instructs, as the two of them go over to put on their shoes and jackets.

He pulls the scarf over his nose as they step into the foyer. One of the sisters is there. She glances up at them once, before going back to the book she was reading. Then, she does a double take.

"It's George," George starts. "And Dream. We were going to take a walk outside."

Dream doesn't say anything. The sister frowns, looks at Dream but doesn't comment.

"If that's alright," George continues. "We'll be back by lunch."

"It's alright," she says, before turning back to her book. "Don't be late, yeah? Or else I'll have to contact the authorities."

Dream breathes a heavy sigh of relief when they finally make their way outside, breath fogging up in the air around them. They do a lap around the facility in silence, before they make their way to the plot of land parallel to the ski chalet.

"I've only skied once before," George tells him, wrapping an arm around himself. "Is it fun?"

"I've only gone on one of the ski trips from here," Dream admits after a moment. "I—I tended to get myself in trouble a lot before them, so I haven't gone recently."

George wonders if he should ask, but Dream's shoulders tense up again underneath his jacket, and he can tell he doesn't really want to talk about it.

"This year?" George asks hopefully.

Dream considers it for a moment. "Maybe. If they let me."

George feels something heavy grow inside of his heart. The curiosity eats him alive. He doesn't understand what someone could do that would make him irredeemable in everyone's eyes and leave them so afraid of him. When he had offhandedly, on accident mentioned to Thomas that Dream and him had a conversation about the homework, he was met with an expression of bewilderment.

If nobody had told him, he wouldn't have made the assumption that Dream was dangerous at all.

"Do you have anything you love, George?" Dream asks him.

George thinks about it for a moment. "What do you mean?"

"Like," he pauses and glances around nervously. "I don't know. I have my— my collection, and reading, and stuff. There anything you like to do?"

George wishes he had a more definitive answer. "No, not really."

A moment passes in silence.

"I used to paint a lot," he offers. "Paint, and draw. But I stopped doing a lot of that, once I turned sixteen."

Dream nods, deep in thought.

"Why?" George asks.

Dream shrugs. "I'm not sure, just wondering. Feel like I don't know very much about you."

I was in the church choir when I was twelve. My father keeps my old sketches in a binder under the sink. I'm a sinner.

“I don’t do much,” George shrugs.

I saw my parents stop loving me. I watched it happen in real time. I watched as my mother decided that she no longer wanted a son. I used to have so much, and now I feel like I have nothing.

“I used to sketch with the charcoal pencils my mother was throwing out,” George continues. “And I used to go running in the forest sometimes.”

I don't care that I'm a sinner. That makes me worse, I think.

He feels dull in comparison to Dream, who’s interesting, who hides poetry under the floorboard because he loves it, who won’t lie to people about liking them because he’s not here to impress them.

“Not what you used to do,” Dream says, staring at him with piercing eyes. “Just— I feel like I only know what you want me to know about you.”

His stomach swerves violently to the left. “Well, yeah. That’s how most conversations work.”

“I don’t mean that,” Dream waves him off, doesn’t bother laughing at the sorry attempt for a joke. “I mean I want to know you.”

“There isn’t much to know,” George admits quietly.

“I’m sure that’s not true,” Dream starts.

A magpie calls out from somewhere. The sound carries over the hills in the distance, slices through the silence like an arrow.

George watches the fog from Dream’s mouth billow out, opens his mouth and breathes in, breathes out. The two of them lock eyes, and George realises how ridiculous he looks. Dream grins, and they laugh.

“I hope the bus crashes on the way back,” Dream says suddenly. “Not enough that anyone gets hurt. Just so that everyone panics, and that lunch gets delayed. So we can stay out a little longer.”

George’s mouth falls open again, both in shock and to laugh at the absurdity of his statement. “I thought you didn’t like being outside.”

“It’s nice,” Dream defends himself. “It’s quiet right now. I changed my mind.”

The sun climbs up a little higher, beats down on Dream, flushed pink cheeks from the cold.

The bus doesn’t crash on the way back, but they manage to finish lunch before mostly everyone comes back inside. George watches the way Dream stabs his fork into the centre of his plate before spinning it, spaghetti sliding off the sides despite his aggressiveness.

When the noise returns in the foyer, and Dream excuses himself back up to his room before the room fills up again, George can’t bring himself to pretend to not be disappointed to watch him go.

what have they done? - nicholas britell
school night - chappell roan

the poem they read is a gift - amy lowell.

hope you all enjoyed the chapter

ty for reading, would love to know ur thoughts in the comments as always, see u in the next one :))

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bloodletting

Chapter Summary

Then you come,
And you are quiet like the garden,
And white like the alyssum flowers,
And beautiful as the silent sparks of the fireflies.
Ah, Beloved, do you see those orange lilies?
They knew my mother,
But who belonging to me will they know
When I am gone.

- Amy Lowell, The Garden by Moonlight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The frigid air is the excuse George uses to sit so close all the time. Dream doesn't seem to mind. He takes it upon himself to invite him to sit with him and Thomas and David during lunch time, but he always refuses, says he'll see George later in the evenings and talk to him then. George knows that it's just because he likes to keep to himself, knows that he's trying to save the two of them from people prying into him for reasons as to why they're friends in the first place, but still.

The paranoia of being watched doesn't go away.

His knuckles have gone white from how hard he's holding on to everyone else around him in a pathetic attempt to not disintegrate. He needs to be glued to someone's side, searching for something to latch onto. Dream doesn't seem to mind, so he tells himself it's even exchange and not parasitic. Nobody is paying attention to him, he tries to remind himself. Nobody cares about him nearly as much as he thinks. It feels less and less true every day. The sisters don't even try to disguise their staring when he walks into the kitchen. Thomas and David keep trying to pry information out of him, information that he doesn't *have*, and wouldn't give up even if he did.

When Dream signs up to read at the next mass, he feels the accusatory stare boring holes through the back of his head from the elders at the back bench, even though he didn't do anything.

"I'm not his keeper, or whatever," George ends up snapping at Thomas when the two of them are meant to be playing cards.

He's tired. He slept poorly.

He can't do anything here. Can't breathe, can't move, can't have a conversation in public without half a dozen ears shifting closer to see what he has to say. It would have been one thing if he had done something, inspired some sort of great shift inside of Dream that pulled him back into God's pasture, but he hadn't. If anything, Dream had inspired something inside of him.

When Dream had said he sometimes felt like an experiment that was kept inside of the walls, George hadn't understood. But now, he feels like he does.

Thomas looks hurt. George doesn't even think to apologise.

"I worry for you," he starts, but George cuts him off.

"You don't need to. I'm fine."

"He hasn't ever read for mass before, is all," David interjects, flashing Thomas a warning glare.

"We were just wondering what you did to convince him."

"I didn't convince him," George repeats for the seventh time today. "We barely speak. He chose to do that himself."

"C'mon George," Thomas says with a knowing smile, and George wants to reach over the table and slap it off his face. "He has to have done something really bad then, or something. There's no way he's reading for fun. Do you think we're stupid?"

"Sometimes," he says, before he even fully registers what he is saying. "You just— why do you *care* what happens to him so badly?"

"It's just not normal," David blurts out. "It's not— you live with the man, aren't you even just a little bit curious as to what he's like?"

"He's not a zoo animal," George scoffs. "He's fine, just quiet sometimes."

David and Thomas are silent as they share another knowing glance.

David finally speaks. "George, don't be stupid. Nobody wants to stay here longer than they have to. He's either done something horrible, or—"

"Or what?"

George jerks forward in his seat in shock, before whipping his head around to see who's speaking. Sister Catherine is standing in front of their table, arms crossed as she looks down at David, who has gone pale. Thomas looks down at rings of wood, suddenly very interested in not being associated with this conversation.

"Sister Catherine," David starts, looking to George for help. "We were just— we're just venting, it's not—"

George searches around the room and sees Dream standing by the window, lips pressed together as he raises his eyebrows at him. He looks away quickly, not wanting to alert him of the conversation going on. This does the opposite, because now Dream is walking straight towards him while Sister Catherine continues to tell David off for speaking ill of his peers. When Dream gets to them, he crosses his arms and stands next to Sister Catherine, and both David and Thomas slump down in their seats.

"I heard my name," Dream says the words carefully, eyes darting between Thomas and David.

"What's the problem?"

"It's dealt with," Sister Catherine hurries to say as she places a hand on his shoulder. "Why don't you take the rest of the evening to yourself?"

"I'm sure it's dealt with," Dream passively agrees, flicking his wrist as he speaks, and George wonders if now is when he finally witnesses what it is about Dream that has earned him this untouchable infamy. "I just want to know what he said."

Thomas looks to him for some reason, like George is meant to do something here. He doesn't. He looks between Sister Catherine, who is closing her eyes in exasperation, while David clenches his jaw so tightly that George can see his chin trembling. He looks to Dream, who glances over at him for a moment before returning his attention to Thomas.

He could prove it right here and now, that he doesn't have any agency over Dream's decision making abilities, and that he's not responsible for how he acts. All he would have to do is ask for Dream to listen to Sister Catherine, which Dream would promptly ignore, and all the eyes would wean themselves off him.

He doesn't. He just blankly stares ahead, waits for something to happen.

Then, nothing does. Dream turns to Sister Catherine, tells her he's available to help set up the mass if she needs assistance, and then he leaves. George almost goes up and chases after him, but he doesn't.

Sister Catherine continues to reprimand both David and Thomas, but luckily leaves George out of it. When she's finished, she waves the two of them off and tells them that they're responsible for the dishes for the next three days. Then, she turns to George.

"I know, I shouldn't have sat there and listened," George surprises even himself with how dismal his tone sounds.

"You did good," Sister Catherine disagrees, before dismissing him as well.

George decides against going back up to the room, because he knows that at breakfast the next day, everyone will stare at him intently, like if they focus hard enough they'll be able to see what happened.

Nothing is going to happen. He still stubbornly sits himself down on a chair in the foyer, pulls a copy of some book he didn't even bother reading the title of off the shelf. He stares down at his lap for as long as he can manage, tries to look too busy to bother. Nobody comes.

Nobody is looking, he tries to remind himself as he walks the steps up to the attic, two at a time. He hesitates before the door. Is Dream going to be mad at him? He hadn't even done anything, but he still feels so guilty.

He swallows down the irrational fear bubbling up in his throat and swings open the door.

Nobody is in here.

He can't help but be disappointed. He likes the time he gets to spend with Dream, cross legged on his bed as Dream goes through his collection, tells George about all the things he thinks about. It's something he gets to look forward to that nobody gets to know about, and if nobody knows about it, nobody can take it from him.

He waits in bed, doesn't bother pretending to read his Bible. Dream comes back close to an hour later, glances over at George, who sits up as soon as he enters the room.

"Hi. You okay?"

Dream offers him a faint smile, and relief is a severe understatement of what George feels. "Been okay, you?"

"I'm okay," George mumbles, suddenly feeling inexplicably shy. "Sorry. About Thomas and

David.”

“Not your fault,” Dream waves off. “I heard what happened. Are they always bothering you about me?”

George shrugs. “I mean, not always, but— yeah, I dunno. They really want to know why you’re here.”

George waits with bated breath for a reaction, but Dream waves it off.

“Yeah,” Dream admits. “I— okay, you can’t tell anyone this, but—” he motions for George to go lock the door.

He practically jumps off the bed, hands shaking as they fiddle with the latch. When he’s sure it’s in place, he walks five steps back, and sits on the edge of Dream’s bed instead of his own. He watches Dream run his teeth over his bottom lip, catching skin.

“I don’t like Thomas,” Dream admits. “When he first got here, he was really close with Ethan, who didn’t like me either, and he’d like— always start arguments, try and get me in trouble, try to like — I don’t know. It didn’t work, whatever they were trying to do. Ethan doesn’t go here anymore.”

George holds his breath.

“Anyways, he did something that pissed me off,” Dream continues, tossing his jacket to his chair, before sitting down on the bed next to George. “And when Ethan’s parents came to visit, I snuck into the room and heard them talking about why he got sent here, and he was— fucked up guy. And then from there, I found out they keep files on why they send people here, if they like— I don’t know, actually. Some people have files, some people don’t.”

Dream picks at the dirt under his fingernails as he speaks, and George’s stomach twists uncomfortably. His parents had been vague with the administration here, he knows, so they’re probably not aware of the entire situation. The idea of a paper trail as to why he had to come here makes him feel uneasy.

“I found out why he got sent here, and told him to his face that if he tried fucking around in my business, I’d make his business everyone’s business,” Dream finishes with a shrug. “David just like, blindly follows whatever he does. I don’t know his deal.”

“What did he do?” George asks in a whisper.

The question he really wants to ask stays unspoken. *What did you do?*

“It’s kind of funny, actually,” Dream snorts. “He tried to steal a thousand dollars from church.”

George is taken aback. “What?”

“Yeah,” Dream laughs. “Like— I don’t know, he snuck into the back and stuffed the cash in his backpack. Maybe. I don’t know. All the file said is that he stole from the church, and he lied about it even when they found the money in his bag. He’s like, a compulsive liar.”

“I thought he had like, a little pickpocketing, or something,” George frowns. “He said he just started hanging out with weird people and it went badly. And that all he wants is to go home to Idaho.”

“His family lives in Wisconsin,” Dream shrugs. “That was what the address on his paperwork said.

You can go check it out yourself. I'll show you where the room is."

George frowns. "What?"

"He's just a liar. He really wanted to know something about me to get me back," Dream tells him. "Which is why he's probably really hung up on you. I mean, honestly, I went through a lot of those files and I don't think stealing from the church is even in the top ten of the worst things people did to get sent here. But his father's a local congressman, so I get why he wouldn't want that to get out."

George frowns even deeper as Dream continues picking at a loose string on his bedsheet, like none of that required any elaboration whatsoever.

"Who's Ethan?" George tries, and Dream's expression immediately tightens.

"He's just a prick," he announces. "He had this whole—I don't want to talk about it. Just a real shitty guy. I'm glad he's gone."

George stares at Dream expectantly, tries to telepathically communicate the question he wants to ask. He's sure Dream can see him, but he chooses not to address it, so George does his best to suffocate the budding curiosity inside of him, again.

"Have you been sleeping okay?" Dream asks, visibly relieved now that the discussion surrounding Ethan was over. "You keep tossing and turning at night."

"Yeah, I'm okay, just— get cold sometimes," George mutters, still hung up on the previous details.

Every time he feels like he has everything figured out, he doesn't.

"Sorry," he adds. "If I'm keeping you up."

"You're not," Dream rushes to say, placing a hand on his knee. "I was just—I was wondering if you'd listen to me practice the prayer."

George nods absentmindedly, gestures for Dream to start. Dream reaches over to his desk and pulls out a sheet of paper, before sitting himself down next to George. George closes his eyes, lets his head fall to Dream's shoulder.

Dream does a good job of sounding like he believes in God. George thinks a lot of people sound superficial while praying. He doesn't think they're the liars though. He's been told that the emotion he feels when he's reading is evident in his voice. If he, of all people, can fake conviction, he's sure there are countless others. Sometimes he tries to guess. Stares at the way the speakers' nose move when they pronounce the vowels, judges the intonation of their voice, picks out who he thinks is a believer and who's there for kicks.

He hadn't thought to do it here.

Honestly, Dream is good. If George didn't know him personally, he would have guessed him to be a devout Christian. There are no crocodile tears, no forced welling of his throat and passionate hand gestures. Dream reads it matter of factly, like he knows there is nothing he has to prove to everyone else in regards to his faith.

George's eyes lull close before he reaches the end. Dream doesn't seem to be discouraged by this. He wraps an arm around George's shoulder, pulls him closer as he continues to recite the prayer. George lets the vibrations in his chest pull him into a state of tranquility, before finally succumbing

to sleep.

It's dark out when he opens his eyes. He groans quietly, crick in his neck from falling asleep against the wall and twisted into Dream. He looks up. Dream is still under him, eyes shut and lips parted as he sleeps.

George doesn't think he's ever seen him up close, not like this. He shifts as slowly as he can.

Dream remains still.

In his sleep-ridden haze, he finds himself tracing his finger over Dream's knuckles. Then he traces his fingers over his own. He wonders how much truth there has been in anything he has been told. He traces over Dream's knuckles again.

Absent-mindedly, he wonders what Dream would say if he knew what George did. He wants to tell him. He's tempted to whisper it into the quiet of the night. He cranes his head to look at the clock. It's a little past two in the morning.

He presses his lips together tightly. His tongue moves inside of his mouth, outlining the words he wants to say. George turns his head, presses his ear against Dream's chest again to hear the gurgling of his heart.

He thinks about Dream, staying here once he's gone. It's a little upsetting, if he's being honest. He wants to be there the day he gets out of here. Maybe Dream will write to him once he leaves. Maybe they'll keep in touch.

"Dream," he whispers, just to test if he's awake.

It can't be comfortable for him. He doesn't make a sound. George pulls the two of them down so that they're lying next to each other, contemplating going back to his own bed. But it's cold. And Dream clearly didn't have a problem with George sharing his.

It's nice to be close to someone like this. Even if Dream didn't have poetry he wanted to share with George, even if he didn't want to talk at all, George thinks he would be more than content with just this. He's been feeling so starved of touch for the last year. Lying here, not alone, was nice.

If he closes his eyes, the hum of the heater almost sounds like the revving of a lawnmower. If he doesn't inhale too loudly, and if he wraps the blanket around him just a little tighter, he can pretend it's summer.

He misses the sun. He misses home. He misses being unwatched.

Dream stirs next to him, so George shifts away in case he wants space. To his surprise, Dream wraps an arm around him and pulls him closer. The moon shifts somewhere in the sky. One of the blankets is pooled at his feet. When he goes to sit up and pull it back over the two of them, Dream pulls him back down.

"No," Dream mumbles into his neck. "S'okay. This is warm enough."

George shivers as his breath dissipates against his skin, swallows hard in an attempt to get the taste of the evening out of his mouth. His head spins, begs him to close his eyes and falls back asleep.

Dream's stubbled chin brushes against his nape, and he freezes as electricity shoots up in his veins.

No, he warns himself. *Not this. Don't do this.*

He's been warring with the thought, has refused to let it into his brain. Dream exhales again, and the hairs on the back of George's neck stand at attention.

No, he warns himself, because this is crucial. Because he came here to get better, he came here to make it easier for his mother, for his father, for himself. He shifts away from Dream, ever so slightly, in an attempt to save himself.

The damage is already done.

Dream exhales again, quieter, softer, and George weakly reprimands himself for missing the way it felt on his skin. It is too late.

Not this, he tries one final time to convince himself as the guilt works itself up again, sits comfortably in his throat and expands in his belly.

Dream breathes out again, and George feels himself go dizzy. He closes his eyes, begs for this to be a delusion, a sick dream he'll wake up from and not remember.

Dream's eyelids flutter open in the morning, butterfly wings under sunlight. George can do nothing but watch, as the familiar sense of doom opens itself up again inside of his chest.

Chapter End Notes

i forgot the word for stubble while writing my head was acc spinning trying to figure out wtf i was trying 2 sayyy. life is so hard fr. anyways hi hope everyone is doing good!! anywayss continuing to spread my amy lowell propaganda.
tysm for reading see you in the next one <3

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self adversary

Chapter Summary

This blood, is an itch.
Cancer in every capillary.
I've been scratching my skin raw,
trying to make myself pure.
Maybe then,
My father would hug me,
as tight as he does his bible.

- Thomas Hill, Pray the gay away

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream opens his eyes slow, front teeth biting over his bottom lip as he blinks again. His chest rises, falls, rises. He turns his head to look at George, smiles lazy at him underneath the morning light, innocent, unaware of what George has just done.

This is not supposed to happen. He closes his eyes, can't bear to look at Dream right now. The guilt presses down on his stomach. His ribs snap, one by one, press their daggered ends into his lungs. The world is ending.

“Are you awake?” Dream whispers.

George swallows hard. “Yes.”

He's pushing some sort of emotional threshold, shaking under the weight of the revelation that has just swallowed him whole. He's not going to get better, not here.

“For Christmas,” Dream starts, the rasp still clinging to his voice. “They like to cook this huge meal, and we all help out in the kitchen. I'm gonna make a pie, wanna help me?”

George turns to look at him, presses his cheek into the bedsheet. He feels dizzy, like he's upside down and inverted, like the bones in his fingers have turned to jelly. Dream's mouth is so close. If he tilted his chin, shifted a little closer, what would Dream say? He's staring, he knows he is, but he can't tear his eyes away.

Dream shifts a little further away from him. “Sorry, I'll go— I'll brush my teeth, I'll be right back.”

George mourns the loss of the body heat as the weight on the bed shifts, off-centering the balance of his entire universe. The panic feels thick and hot and heavy, and George sits up as fast as he can, runs his hands through his hair, and wonders why this has to happen to him.

He doesn't say anything, just stumbles to the front of the room and slips on his sneakers, makes his way to the chapel.

He doesn't let himself think while he walks, because he feels like if he does his legs might give out halfway down the staircase.

He's on his knees, pressing his forehead to the cold tile of the ground, staring blankly at the empty altar for something, anything. A sign that this is just another test of faith, or some divine intervention that provides guidance. He stares at the cross at the wall as he grips the one around his neck. It provides no clarity, no moment of reassurance on the topic of God's love for him. Sudden inspiration to return to faith. *Something, anything.*

Nothing comes.

He feels stupid on the floor like this, with no one watching him. At the very least, if George was only a liar to the priests and the sisters and his peers, he would have the excuse of survival. It's pathetic, how he needs to commit to the part, how he needs to try and convince himself that this is what he wants too.

The seminary will fix it, he tries to tell himself. The seminary will fix it. It has to fix it. The same way that Jericho was supposed to fix it. The same way that his entire childhood should have prevented it from happening in the first place. This isn't supposed to happen to him. He's been good, been pushing down and lowering his gaze and bearing the weight of the burden instead of acting on it. Most of the time, he's done anything but act on it.

His mother and father's money, down the drain. It's expensive to be here, a privilege to be here, and George is zoning out during the prayers and letting his mind climb back up the stairs into his bedroom, sitting on the floor like a dog, waiting for Dream to come back. He's sick all over again.

His mother held him while he cried when he was a baby. She'd held him while he cried well into thirteen, then fifteen, then seventeen. His father was a good, honest man. When George was seven, he'd been diagnosed with shoulder arthritis. When George was fourteen, he sprained his ankle on a fishing trip. His father had hoisted him onto his back, carried him a mile and a half to the truck, drove him to the hospital and didn't complain once. Good people, loving people, stuck with him, and fuck, George can't blame them for not wanting to look at him.

Most of the time, he can at the very least convince himself that he's not a bad person. He thinks things that he shouldn't, but he doesn't go out and actively try to get worse when people believe in his recovery. He's been horrible to everyone, been wasting everyone's time, including his own, including Dream's.

His mother and father had already found out he was a liar, found out how sick and twisted he was that he would attempt to deceive them in an attempt for what, exactly?

The tile of the floor is cold against his forehead. He feels pathetic as he gets to his feet. He dusts off his knees, and the door creaks open behind him. He turns to see a priest walk in behind him. They lock eyes, nod at each other. He feels like he could physically recoil. He wishes nobody could see him when he comes here, because he comes to try and un-sever one connection, and leaves with the weight of two sins instead of just one.

Dream is sitting on his bed, when he gets back. He looks up at George, smiles nervously. His hair is still damp from the shower. George steps closer. Dream reaches out and wraps two fingers around his wrist, and George knows Dream can feel him trembling in his grasp.

"I'll help with your pie," George tells him quietly, sitting down next to him.

Dream shifts closer. He feels like he's going to be sick.

“Are you alright?” Dream asks, the pad of his index finger brushing across George’s wrist, and George thinks that he is going to die.

Fuck, what would Dream say if he found out what George was thinking?

He’d spent so long up here, alone. He trusts George, enough to show him things that could get him in trouble, enough to want to talk to him. George had thought, for just a moment, that maybe he deserved to be somebody Dream could trust.

What is he doing?

The room spins as Dream places the back of his hand against George’s forehead. “You’re looking pale, are you alright?”

The blood rushes to his cheeks, and God, George knows that he’s fucked. The corners of Dream’s mouth press outwards, and George wants to drown in him. If anyone had been dealt a poor hand, it was Dream. He’s been stuck in this room, and he’s clearly brilliant, and he’s been wanting for a friend, and instead he has George.

What would Dream do if he found out?

George’s blood runs cold at the thought. He doesn’t want to think about the worst possible outcome. He tries to consider it, but he stops, because he doesn’t even believe Dream would be horrible to him about it.

He needs to say something, anything, but his brain has gone fuzzy with Dream’s hand against his forehead.

“I’m fine,” George whispers. “Just slept weird.”

Dream’s eyes cast downwards, guilty and George feels like he’s burned him.

“Sorry, if you were uncomfortable,” Dream starts, but George shakes his head no.

“It wasn’t you! I just— I slept on a weird nerve in my neck, and now everything just kind of feels weird, that’s all. It’s not— I’m good, don’t worry.”

When the lines between Dream’s eyebrows smooth out, he feels better too.

“Some people go home for Christmas,” Dream says softly. “Are you going?”

Nothing but radio silence from home. He presumes not.

“It’s not weird if you don’t,” Dream tells him. “Don’t worry! Most people don’t. Just some people do, and you’re not here for anything court mandated, I think— so I just thought that you might. Not that I want you gone or anything.” He pauses, offers a smile. “I like having you here.”

George’s heart squeezes painfully inside of his chest. Dream trusts him, wants him around. No matter what he feels for him, he knows one thing is for certain. He cannot take distance.

It would be pointless to even try. They live in the same room. He’s afraid of the others speculating on why. His throat closes up at the idea of Thomas or David or anyone else finding out about this. Even if they find out, by some miracle, about George, he’s going to be gone in two months anyways. Dream is here for an indefinite amount of time, and he doesn’t need any more rumours following him around, keeping him here any longer than he needed to be.

“They take us skiing next week, and then to town on the way back for dinner,” Dream continues, before he looks down at his fingers, flexing them. “They said I could come this year.”

George looks at him, smiles, hopes to God that his heart is not beating as loud as he thinks it is, cheeks aren’t as red as they feel. “Really?”

Dream grins. “Yeah, they said— said I’m doing good.”

His expression turns grave again.

“What?” George asks, suddenly paranoid that all of his thoughts are being projected above his head, that Dream can tell that George is on the verge of passing out onto the floor, from pathetically setting another ultimatum against God.

Make this go away, he wants to demand. *Make this go away and I will never complain again.*

When he was a kid, his friends from church would tell him that sometimes they’d try doing that, and sometimes God would listen. When George had told his mother, she had reprimanded him, kept him a little further away from the other kids, because God isn’t exactly someone he should be trying to cross.

Sometimes, he had hoped that God would bring His wrath down upon him. At least that it was proof that he existed. At least then, George would have something to fear, have some sort of motivation to keep building up this hellish life on Earth for a chance at eternal bliss.

There is no home in the clouds or bed of stars waiting for him, no golden table card with his name on it, promising him that there’s a place for him once all of this is over.

Eighty years, if you’re lucky, is hardly a price to pay for eternity, he rationalises. But if there is no eternity, then it is all for nothing. If this is all there is, then George has nothing.

“Nothing,” Dream says softly, in response to his question, fingers moving towards George’s ear.

Dream presses his thumb against George’s earlobe, before shifting it down over to the corner below his jaw. “Can feel your pulse here.”

George needs to move back, move away, not involve Dream in his mess when it all inevitably blows up on him. His eyes begin to close of their own volition.

“You’re always so tired,” Dream laughs, and before George can apologise and step away, Dream is pulling him into his chest, and George is weak, because he’s already done fighting for today.

Tomorrow, he thinks. Tomorrow this will be done. He lets himself slump into him.

“As much as I’d like to stay here all day,” Dream starts. “I think that— I think we should go down now.”

George swallows hard, pulls away before stumbling into the bathroom. The embarrassment begins to spill inside of his chest first, then finally infiltrates the rest of his bloodstream. What is he doing, brushing up against Dream like some fucking street animal desperate for attention?

He doesn’t face the mirror as he changes, can’t stand to look at himself right now. He tries to picture Dream, looking at him with disdain in his eyes when he learns why George has been sent here.

The worst part is that he can't.

He doesn't think Dream would hate him. He tries to push that thought away the moment it comes into fruition, but he's unsuccessful again. Dream is understanding, and intelligent, and George wants to think that they care for each other. And maybe, there's a chance that Dream won't kick him to the curb and demand that he be put in a separate room in the scenario that he finds out.

Which is why he can *never* find out.

"I'm sitting with you today," George mutters as he grabs his room keys from the hook behind the door. "Don't wanna fucking— I don't know. They're— Thomas and David are pissing me off."

Dream nods in understanding. George half expects an 'I told you so' but it doesn't come.

He volunteers to stay back and clean up after dinner. Dream tries to stay with him, but Sister Catherine insists he goes upstairs and gets some rest.

"He's been good, recently," Sister Catherine tells George.

George glances towards the window. "He's really nice, actually. He's always good."

The panic seems to have decided to take a break, and a violent sense of resignation has settled into his bones. The hopelessness of his future has caught up with him. He's going to leave this place, and go to the seminary, and live the rest of his life out as somebody else. Maybe, along the way, he will manage to delude himself into thinking he's happy, the same way he's done his entire life. Today, he's wallowing in all of the truths he doesn't have the courage to face.

"He's— Dream is..." Sister Catherine starts, like she's unsure of what to say, and George hopes to God she doesn't say anything he'll end up reacting emotionally to, because then he's fucking himself and Dream over.

To say that Dream is the only one that understands him would be untrue. George doesn't even understand himself, doesn't understand why he ends up doing the things he does. It feels like everyone else is sure that he is who he is. Dream can see right fucking through him, knows at the very least that there is something wrong with the image he's so delicately crafted. Dream makes him feel like his chest has been torn open, pieces of him scattered around him in a mess of indecision and wrong choices. Dream acts like the mess of him is nothing to fear, that somewhere inside the obscurations and tangle of arteries, and layers and layers of duplicity, there is something worthy of salvation.

"Dream knows what he wants," Sister Catherine finally decides upon. "And he won't do anything he doesn't want to do, and he won't stop himself from acting a certain way even if the consequences may not work out in his favour."

George nods, sprays vinegar over the tables and wipes it down. "Yeah. He's not— he's not horrible, though. He's a good person, I think. He's been very nice to me."

He's testing the waters. He looks up to gauge Sister Catherine's reactions, but she remains stoic as she picks a napkin up off the floor.

"He's been taking more initiative since you got here," she notes.

She looks left, then right, before looking at George. "I'll let you in on a little secret then, yeah?"

George nods, coils in his stomach, tightening in anticipation.

"We had a spare room for you," Sister Catherine begins. "But your mother came in, a few days before you did, and she told us she was going to perhaps withdraw your name from the program. She was very distraught, said she could deal with whatever issue it was that you were dealing with at home."

George swallows hard at this new information, tries to push down the swell of emotion in his chest.

"We told her that we'd put you in mentorship programs, try not to structure this as so much of a punishment, than a chance to reflect," Sister Catherine is choosing her words carefully. "I can see why she cares about you, George."

"She's my mother," George laughs nervously, wiping over the surface of the table.

"Well, yes, but I've met plenty of mothers. Usually, they'll search for any reason to deny their sons of wrongdoing," Sister Catherine thinks for a moment, before continuing. "But she was— she wasn't trying to excuse you of anything. Instead, she wanted something better for you, so that's why you're here."

George finds the rice that has managed to adhere itself to the table very interesting, all of a sudden.

"Your mother loves you," Sister Catherine says it like she knows it to be true, like she was there in the car when she couldn't bear look at her own son, like she had laid in the bed next to his parents' room and listened to them talk about all the things they should have stifled of him so it wouldn't have gotten this far. "She loves you enough to know that you're someone who is worth saving."

Finishing blow. The irony hurts so bad that it's almost a little funny.

George has never been someone worth saving, not by God, and certainly not from anyone here.

"We put you in the room with Dream because we thought you would be a good influence on him," Sister Catherine finishes, as George places the wet towel back into the bucket of water, tables finally clean. "And I can't see what's going on in your head, but you're doing everything right by the book. And somewhere, along the way, you've helped provide guidance to Dream as well."

George has fucking painted a target onto Dream's forehead, the second everyone finds out about this. If George is even allowed to leave, after that, he and Dream surely will be separated. Their room will be searched. He thinks of the little collection of poems underneath the floorboard, and his heart aches at the idea of being the reason that Dream's only sanctuary is taken away from him.

He smiles, thanks Sister Catherine after she dismisses him and disappears into the kitchen. When he steps out into the stairwell between the dormitory wings to get back to the attic, he notices his laces are untied. He drops to his knees, clumsy fingers working to get it done as fast as possible so he can climb into bed, into Dream's arms for a moment, if he's allowed to indulge just one last time.

The door swings open behind him. Two sets of footsteps. The door shuts.

"Hello, George," he hears someone say.

He glances up to see Thomas and David standing over him. Neither of them look pleased.

Chapter End Notes

hey girlypops hope u liked the chapter. by the rate i am moving this is going to end up... long. omg.

the poem in the beginning is an excerpt and you can read the full thing here i was really moved by it when i first heard it - [pray the gay away - thomas hill](#)
would love to know ur thoughts in the comments as alwaysss see u in the next one

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matchstick to fuse

Chapter Summary

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I thought
My mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here -

- Emily Dickinson, I felt a Funeral, in my Brain

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The familiar feeling of dread begins to ebb in his stomach, but he takes a deep breath and pushes it down.

He's overthinking for nothing. They have no reason to be angry with him, nothing concrete. This is a talk between friends, nothing more than that. Nothing is going to happen.

Nothing, nothing, nothing, he repeats to himself before he speaks.

"What are you doing up this late?" George asks, getting to his feet.

His stomach is twisting itself into knots, even though he knows that they can't do anything to him, *won't* do anything to him, not when he can yell out for anyone. He's safe, he reminds himself. For a moment, his vision splits into two ghostly casts that cross over each other, before reality sits clearly in front of him again.

Neither of them answer him. David steps towards one of the exits, blocking it off, while Thomas steps closer, and George can no longer delude himself into thinking this interaction is planned to be innocuous.

"You're scaring me," George laughs nervously as he steps backwards, towards the staircase.

"Why're you scared?" Thomas asks, tilting his head to the side. "Have you done something wrong?"

Nothing that concerns them, if George is being honest. "No, why would you think that?"

“Because,” Thomas starts. “I have a feeling that you and Dream are closer than you let on, and I may have made a mistake trusting you.”

George can see why he feels that way, would go as far as to say he’s justified in feeling that way. Still, he hasn’t got anything to do with this supposed rivalry between Thomas and Dream, and he doesn’t plan on getting involved. He’s keeping his head down, passing through, killing time.

“We aren’t close,” George laughs nervously. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

George is a good liar, but Thomas doesn’t look like he believes him. Both of them stand still for a moment, and George wonders if taking a chance and making a break for it would end up working out in his favour. He’d still have to see the two of them tomorrow, but he can handle avoiding two people for two months.

Before he can make a decision on what to do, there’s a hand grabbing the hem of his shirt, and no matter how hard he tries to break free of the grip, he can’t.

The panic is beginning to settle in now.

“I’ll scream,” he threatens. “I’ll scream, so don’t—”

“Why?” Thomas asks, tilting his head to the side in what George is sure is faux confusion. “We’re not doing anything to you. We just wanted to check in, see if you were okay.”

“Don’t touch me,” George says, shoving him backwards and side stepping towards the staircase, because he needs to leave right now, before anything else can happen.

Thomas’ hand tugs at his sleeve, harder this time, and before George can even understand what’s happening, the back of his head is hitting the wall, and he’s being lifted up into the air by the collar.

“We weren’t gonna do anything,” Thomas repeats, firmer this time, before he drops George to his feet. “Stop acting crazy.”

George inhales, exhales, then touches the back of his head.

David finally speaks. “We’ll see you tomorrow then, yeah?”

The easy thing to do here is lie. But he knows that tomorrow, he’s not going to speak to them, or anyone else here for that matter other than Dream. If the confrontation doesn’t come today, it’ll come tomorrow, so George decides to bite the bullet.

“I don’t think I will,” he says, watching carefully as Thomas’ jaw juts out at his words, clearly displeased.

“Why not?” he presses. “Did Dream tell you something about me?”

George isn’t going to throw Dream under the bus. He can fight his own battles.

“No,” George insists, but he can see that David doesn’t believe him. “But you’re being stupid right now.”

“He told you something,” Thomas pressed, hands going to grab George’s collar again.

George ducks down under his arm and finally manages to get two steps up the staircase, at least out of arm’s reach from the two of them. “He didn’t.”

“He did,” Thomas states. “Tell me what he told you, George.”

“He didn’t tell me anything, we barely talk,” George snaps. “I just don’t— you only talk to me to get to know things about Dream, and I just don’t want to get caught up in your mess. And cornering me in the middle of the night and trying to beat me up isn’t exactly doing you any favours.”

We’re not here to *beat you up*, don’t be ridiculous,” David starts. “You don’t— are you seriously considering taking his word over ours? He’s fucked up, George, there’s a reason he’s been put up in the attic all alone for so long.”

“Yeah,” Thomas continues, giving David the side eye for a moment before focusing his attention back to George. “We’re just trying to make sure you don’t get caught up in something you don’t want to be caught up in.”

“I live with him,” George responds. “I have to speak with him. And— and I’m not risking getting on bad terms with him because you think— I don’t even know what your problem with him is!”

“He’s a bad person,” Thomas doubles down.

He’s not getting any clarification past that, it seems.

“Don’t be stupid, George,” David says as he rolls his eyes and crosses his arms across his chest. “This isn’t nearly as serious as you’re making it out to be.”

“You just pushed me up against the wall to threaten me!” George exclaims in disbelief, sirens echoing in the back of his mind as everything inside of him tells him to leave, cut the conversation short while he still can, not to try to dissect every detail when he knows a wrong move could end very poorly for him.

“You’re being dramatic,” David insists. “We’re just talking! C’mon, don’t—”

“I’m done, thank you,” George says, turning to walk up the stairs, when someone grabs the back of his shirt and throws him off the staircase, to the ground.

He lands on his back, head inches from the ground as David and Thomas look down at him. His shoulders hurt, but the height he was just thrown from wasn’t all that far, and he can still get to his feet and get upstairs, all he has to do is move, just push himself off the ground, and stop breathing so fucking heavy, and stop shaking.

“You’re so fucking— God, I fucking knew the moment I saw you walk in, all scared and shit. You don’t have a clue what you’re dealing with, George,” Thomas spits from above him, but he’s having a hard time focusing because this can’t happen again, *won’t* happen to him again, for any reason.

A leg draws itself back to kick at him, and he should open his mouth and yell, Sister Catherine is probably still downstairs and close enough to hear him. He recoils, arms over his head, waits.

Someone scoffs. “C’mon. You had no problem being mouthy just a few minutes ago. Get up.”

George doesn’t want to get up. He’s not winning a fight against both David and Thomas. Maybe he could take on Thomas alone, but definitely not David.

“I didn’t do anything,” he manages to croak out. “Let me go.”

“Go then,” Thomas says, stepping backwards. “Nobody’s stopping you.”

The stairwell goes silent. George listens for footsteps, someone, anyone, but nobody comes. When the silence begins to get too heavy to bear, he manages to get to his feet, keeps his eyes casted downwards as the hot shame begins to roll down the inside of his chest.

“Don’t expect us to help you out,” Thomas calls out to him as he steps up the staircase. “When he ends up fucking you over, don’t come back.”

George squeezes his eyes shut for a moment, before reopening them, reminding himself that nothing’s going to happen, nothing like the incident that put him here will ever happen again, and he’s just reacting defensively because he’s scared, but there’s no real danger present, and nothing bad is going to happen because he’s going to get out of here in two months and all of this will just be a bad memory.

The door swings open below him, and footsteps retreat, and George is alone in the stairwell again. Thomas and David are gone, and all he has to do is get to the third floor, and they don’t have the keys for that, so nothing is going to happen, and the worst of it is over.

So much for defending his own dignity, it seems, because he doesn’t want to respond and end up in the middle of something he’s not going to win. His head spins as he climbs up the remainder of the steps, hands tremble as he tries to unlock the door.

He feels so stupid, so stupid and small compared everyone else here, who seems to be so sure in their own footing and their own righteousness and *fuck*, if George doesn’t miss home right now. He’s confused, and he’s tired, and he wants to forget all of this even happened.

Dream is at his desk when he opens the door, and he can’t face him, not right now, so he locks himself in the bathroom before he can even turn his head to say hello. He looks fine in the mirror. There’s no visible bruising, no scratch marks or anything that could possibly indicate that something happened. He’s fine, he’s fine, he’s opening the door and Dream is standing right outside, head tilted as he stares down at George.

“You okay?”

“Yeah,” George rushes out to say, trying to move past him and get to his bed. “Yeah, just really tired, all of a sudden, I think I’m going to bed.”

A hand grabs his forearm and he flinches out of instinct, before he remembers it’s just Dream. He opens his mouth to justify himself, but it’s too late.

“I’m just jumpy,” George rushes out to say.

Dream frowns. “You’ve never been jumpy with me.”

“We’ve only known each other for a month,” George laughs nervously. “You probably didn’t notice.”

“George,” Dream starts, placing his other hand on George’s other arm, forcing the two of them to stand parallel to each other.

He doesn’t deserve this. The gentle treatment Dream gives him, soft touch and soft words, the benefit of the doubt, this unearned belief in his capabilities. Dream, who despite facing judgement for following through with what he believed in, did what he thought was right, always. Who in the face of every rumour, of people talking about him and judging him and thinking they were worthy

of deciding what would happen to him when he was dead, still did whatever he wanted because he thought it was better than being a liar.

Dream is truthful, and good, and brave, and George is a coward, and a liar, and hyper aware of the distance between the two of them closing in as Dream pulls him to his chest. George shivers, because of the cold, because that's why he's shaking, and not because every time he keeps his mouth closed and the resentment and the anger inside of him festers, grows more and more restless by the minute, demands to spill out of him.

"George," Dream says his name so softly, and George has never been particularly fond of it, but he wants to hear Dream say it again and again, again and again and again and again.

George closes his eyes. "Tired."

"George," Dream says again, and it feels like maybe everything will be okay, until Dream makes him sit down and draws back so that he's just holding George's arms again. "What happened?"

"S'nothing," he mutters, trying to grab the edge of his duvet. "Nothing, don't worry. I'm just tired."

"You shouldn't have stayed back at the kitchen alone if you were tired," Dream reprimands.

"It's fine, Dream, just go to bed," George tells him, closing his eyes. "I'm sleepy. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"We're cooking tomorrow," Dream reminds him. "Apple pie okay?"

"Yeah," George wants to be done with this conversation, wants to wallow in self pity again until sleep takes him, and he can finally get a few moments of peace in between the drawn out moments where he has to walk around on autopilot.

Dream doesn't press the issue further. He turns out the lights.

The kitchen is more full than George expected it to be. Everyone is sitting in pairs in the tables, working away at something. George scans the room to locate David and Thomas, but he can't seem to spot them. His back hurts today, but nothing looked out of the ordinary other than the light bruising across his shoulder, so he considers it a marginally better outcome than what it could have been.

Sister Catherine watches as Dream struggles to unpeel the green apples. George sits next to him, waiting patiently for him to finish the first one so he can cut it into pieces.

"If you'd like some help," she starts. "The cook would be more than happy. Just wave her down."

Then she glances towards the foyer. "I have to discuss something very important with someone who has just come in. Can I trust you to behave?"

George mutters out a "yes ma'am" before she walks away.

Dream sets the apple down, looking around quickly before placing a hand on George's shoulder. "George."

George flinches back again and curses under his breath. “Yes?”

“Did anyone do anything to you?” Dream asks, frowning as he leans in closer to whisper, George really wishes he wouldn’t, because it might inspire something inside of him to do something stupid, like close the gap between them.

George shakes his head no.

“George, I’m not stupid,” Dream whispers, and George takes the vegetable peeler from him, lodges the blade deep into the apple so that he can peel it properly.

“You have to be a little bit tougher with the apple,” George tells him. “You’re going to be here all day if you try to just scratch off the skin. You have to—”

“George.”

“David and Thomas and I had a fight, okay? Can we drop it now?” George exhales sharply as he finishes skinning the apple, tosses the green peel to the side. “I’ll peel, you cut.”

He hands Dream the knife, before taking another apple out of the basket. Dream slices through the middle of it, knife clicking against the wood of the cutting board, and George is relieved that he doesn’t have to lie to Dream.

“You don’t even like them,” Dream frowns, leaning close again to whisper in George’s ear. “What really happened?”

“Nothing,” George insists, and Dream clearly doesn’t buy it but he drops it for now.

They work in silence, until Sister Catherine rushes back into the room and tells them all that they can go to their rooms or sit in the courtyard for the next two hours, because there’s someone important coming in to take a look around. George wordlessly helps Dream spoon the half dozen apples they’ve cut up into a large bowl. Dream goes to put it in the fridge while George wipes down the area, before they’re both ushered away into the stairwell. Dream grabs his wrist when he tries to go up the stairs, runs his thumb over George’s knuckles in apology when he flinches again.

“Just a moment,” Dream mutters under his breath.

When David and Thomas file in, Dream snaps his fingers twice, and George’s heart drops to his stomach, because he doesn’t want to do this, not now, not here, not ever.

Until now, George has thought that the rumours surrounding Dream’s volatile nature were nothing more than talk. He could understand why people would assume Dream was an angry person, understand that boredom bred rumours and that things could get contrived and Dream is intimidating at first, so he understands why people would be quick to believe those things, but then the colour drains from both David and Thomas’ face in sync and George knows he’s about to find out if any of the talk is based in actual truth, and he doesn’t want to.

“Dream,” George urges. “Let’s go.”

“I just want to talk,” Dream insists. “Don’t worry, this just has to do with me. If you don’t want to be here you’re free to leave.”

George wants to, but he stays rooted in place. When everyone else has filed out of the stairwell, David speaks first.

“We didn’t do anything.”

Dream tilts his head sideways. “I didn’t say anything.”

“He’s making shit up, Dream,” Thomas stars, clenching his hands into fists. “We didn’t do anything to him.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Dream asks loudly, and both of them shut up, and George inhales, exhales, because it’s fine, everything is fine, and it’ll be over in just a few moments.

He feels so small, and now it looks like he needs Dream to fight his battles for him.

“I need your copies of your readings for the Christmas mass back, Sister Catherine said she gave me the wrong ones to give to you.”

Morphine relief in George’s bloodstream. This has nothing to do with him.

“But now I’m curious, actually,” Dream starts. “As to what you’re talking about.”

“Nothing,” George says, grabbing Dream’s arm out of instinct and tugging him towards the staircase. “Dream, c’mon, can we go?”

David and Thomas start to step backwards, but Dream shrugs off George’s hand and grabs onto David’s wrist, squeezes tightly.

“David,” Dream starts, voice low, and apprehension writhes around inside of George but he’s frozen in place, can’t do anything. “If you tell me what Thomas did, you can leave.”

“He didn’t do anything,” David mutters. “We just— we all had a fight yesterday. It’s no big deal. We’re all friends again, right George?”

George swallows, tongue suddenly swollen in his mouth.

“Right George?” Thomas asks, and George doesn’t want a fight, doesn’t want to see anyone get hurt, doesn’t want Dream to get in trouble.

He doesn’t say anything. Dream drops David’s wrist. “I want the copies back at dinner, okay? Sister Catherine wants them tonight.”

Both David and Thomas nod.

“Get out,” Dream says to David, who doesn’t so much as even look back. Thomas goes to leave too, but Dream stops him.

“Thomas, c’mere, there’s something I need to show you,” Dream says as he pulls a piece of paper out of his pocket.

George tunes out as they discuss something about needing to move the benches in the chapel to touch the walls tomorrow morning, before the Christmas Eve mass instead of after.

“One more thing,” Dream says as he tucks the page into his pocket.

George is already on the second step, ready to leave. He doesn’t get why he has to be here, but then he remembers that Dream’s the only one out of the two of them that bought their room key down today.

Thomas looks up at him. “Hm?”

Dream raises a fist and clocks Thomas right on the cheek. It happens so fast, that George only gasps in reaction as Thomas is reeling.

“The doors to the chapel are pretty heavy,” Dream casually remarks, and George stares at him in shock. “If someone was coming out, and you were standing right behind it, it would really hurt, right? Could even bruise.”

Thomas is clutching his cheek and staring down at the floor. “Yeah. It could.”

“Dream,” George says in disbelief.

“Yeah, I’m tired,” Dream says, stepping behind George. “Let’s go.”

George stares at Thomas for a moment longer, but he doesn’t react, just stands there staring at the ground with a hand over his cheek, other arm dangling helplessly at his side. He looks to Dream, whose jaw is clenched as he stares down at Thomas, angry. His gaze softens when he turns to George.

“Let’s go.”

George glances back at Thomas one last time, guilt settling into his bones. He looks to Dream, expects to feel upset, angry even, but there’s nothing.

They climb up the stairs in silence.

Chapter End Notes

i am being passed around like the village whore by the boston-native-lesbian poet
girlies. lmk what u think in the comments see u in the next one

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catatonic

Chapter Summary

Finally, in a low whisper, he said, 'I think I might be a terrible person.' For a split second I believed him - I thought he was about to confess a crime, maybe a murder. Then I realized that we all think we might be terrible people. But we only reveal this before asking someone to love us. It is a kind of undressing.

- Miranda July, The First Bad Man

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The walk down the corridor leading to the bedroom is quiet. Dream's boots are heavy against the hardwood floor. George remembers he forgot to sweep yesterday, in his exhaustion. The door unlocks, the two of them step inside. The door closes. George looks at Dream. Dream is looking at him.

Red of Dream's cheeks. The sharp edge of his jaw, the slope of his nose, and George is grabbing his collar and shaking him.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" he whispers as loudly as he can to get his point across.

Dream looks down at him and tilts his head sideways, places a hand on each of George's wrists. "It's okay, don't worry."

George's hands drop to his side.

"It's not," George says out loud as he kicks off his shoes.

"George," Dream says his name softly. "Can we talk about it?"

George glares as hard as he can, and Dream inhales, exhales through his mouth, hot air.

"You're so fucking stupid Dream, you could have been seen," George tells him, pressing his finger into Dream's chest to drive the point home. "And if Thomas decides to tell someone tomorrow—"

"He won't," Dream cuts in.

"If he does," George continues like he hasn't spoken, because the shock has finally begun to wear off and the reality of the situation has begun to sink in. "Do you even— do you even *want* to get out of here? Holy shit, I thought— you said that—"

"George, I promise that wasn't an impulse decision," Dream's voice is gentle, like he's trying to console him. "I thought about it last night, don't worry."

"That makes this worse," George spits at him.

George hasn't been angry like this in so long. Not when he was in the hospital, not when he was

told he was going to be sent here, not when the man he had met in the forest had almost killed him. Even downstairs, even a few moments ago, he was fine, but this didn't need to happen, especially not on his behalf.

"I saw your shoulder was bruised, yesterday," Dream argues back, crossing his arms over his chest. "I'm not letting anything else happen to you."

"You're not— that's not your job! I didn't ask you to!"

"And you didn't have to," Dream's tone turns cold, firm, and the hallowed area underneath his eyes is especially prominent when he holds up his chin like that. "It's not on you, don't worry. I chose to hit him, and if he decides to be stupid and tell, it won't be you getting trouble anyways—"

"You idiot," George hisses, pushing Dream backwards so he has to sit on the bed and look up at George, because George is so tired of yelling upwards, feeling small, being made to feel small. "I'm not worried about me, I'm worried about *you*."

The tension between Dream's eyebrows disintegrates, his lips part as his mouth opens in shock. The pupils of his eyes go wide for a moment, swallow the brown specks in the gold of his eyes, flesh around his nose untightening, and George's hands are on his cheeks, pressing delicately before he even knows what he's doing.

"I doubt Sister Catherine will be forgiving knowing you hit someone two days before Christmas," George says between gritted teeth, thumbs resting right in the dips beneath Dream's eyes. "Christ, Dream, are you *trying* to be stuck here even longer?"

Dream's eyes slip closed and he leans forward, pressing his weight into George's hands. George swallows hard as his fingers twitch, splay themselves across Dream's cheeks, collarbones, his ring finger against the corner of his mouth, the thrum of Dream's pulse underneath his pinkie. Brilliant life, brave life, palpitating in George's hands, and *God*, George thinks that the closeness might kill him, but he can't pull away.

Dream's hands meet his hips. He rolls his thumbs over George's hipbones and George feels his nails press into the flesh of Dream's face in surprise for a moment, before he withdraws himself completely. Dream looks up at him, crescent indents along the outline of his jaw, left by George's fingers.

"Dream," George repeats, but Dream doesn't say anything, just stares up at him.

"Dream," George says again. "You can't—"

"They put a kid in the hospital," Dream says before George can finish his sentence.

George swallows hard, waits for Dream to elaborate.

"The spare bedroom," Dream clears his throat. "There's a reason they didn't give it to you."

"I know," George says as Dream pulls him onto the bed so that he's sitting across from him, shifts so the two of them are looking at each other. "Sister Catherine told me that—"

"Whatever she told you was a lie," Dream blurts out. "If she said something about you having to save me, or that you're special, or that you're here for something different than everyone else, she lied to you."

Dream's eyes, nose, mouth. George's mouth goes dry.

“Why would they put you in a room with me, of all people, if I’m so dangerous and awful?” Dream says the words like they taste bitter.

The tendons of his hands flex. George places his palms over them. *Wrists, neck, mouth.*

“Ethan used to bag on this kid named Oliver a lot. Oliver was really quiet, didn’t know him too well, but if I saw Ethan talking to him, I’d go and tell him to fuck off.”

A beat in silence. *Neck, mouth, the junction between.*

“I didn’t do nothing about it,” Dream says, hands moving over George’s, squeezing. “I didn’t.”

George doesn’t say anything, waits for him to continue.

“Ethan thought it was really funny, that Oliver would get all red when he made fun of him. Most of the priests just sort of let it slide, chalked it up to like— I don’t know, horsing around. But then Oliver tried to kill himself in that bedroom they won’t give anyone now, and nobody thought it was funny anymore.”

George’s hands go limp in Dream’s grip.

“They took Oliver out, obviously, and then I told Ethan he was a real piece of shit for bagging on this kid— he was like, I don’t know, he couldn’t have been older than fifteen, he was really young — and they were gonna let Ethan stay. Daddy’s money was going to make all of it go away.”

Dream closes his eyes, and George stares at the ripples of exhaustion etched down his cheeks.

“I didn’t want that fucker anywhere near me, or anyone else here.”

“So you punched him in the chapel?” George blurts out before he even knows what he’s saying, but then his eyes widen in horror. “Sorry, I didn’t—”

“No, you’re right,” Dream’s lips quirk upwards. “I broke his nose. And then they had to take him out. And I don’t regret it.”

“But what about— they let you stay?” George asks, hands moving of their own accord again, running through Dream’s hair, pressing the loose strands backwards.

Dream shrugs. “Yeah. They’ve still got time to fix me, or whatever. They can try.”

George’s heart aches for him.

“David and Thomas didn’t like Oliver, but Ethan was the worst. Bastard, I hope his nose never sets right. Should have knocked out a tooth while I had the chance,” Dream spits. “I only hit him once. I should have done more damage.”

“It’s done,” George offers. “You don’t— he’s gone.”

He doesn’t know what else to say, what else to offer other than gentle admiration. George is a coward. In Dream’s place he would have done nothing but think, let the rotten thoughts and the guilt fester until it made him go crazy. He runs his fingers over each knuckle, each dip, every crevice and faded scar on Dream’s hands.

Dream exhales. “You’re fucking driving me crazy.”

George stops. Goes to withdraw but Dream grabs his hands again, clutches them like they’re his

lifeline.

“No, it’s— it’s nice. I like it.”

George brushes the tips of his fingers across Dream’s heartline, before sliding his hands back over his palms. The skin is still cold to touch.

“You’re so brave,” George breathes out. “I really— I really admire that about you. Your courage.”

Dream goes red under the yellow lights, and George wants to be baptised in this feeling.

“But don’t,” he whispers. “Don’t go fighting my battles for me. I can handle myself, alright?”

He watches for the corners of Dream’s mouth to quirk up into a smile.

“George,” Dream starts. “Why are you here?”

Fall from grace. George relives the shame of getting caught all over again.

“Why are *you* here, Dream?” George breathes out.

Dream shakes his head no. “I’m not sure if I can tell you.”

Blood against the white of the clovers. Blood in his nose, eyes, throat. The heaviness in his chest, the dark space where the skin covering his ribs was. The medical bill on the kitchen table. His mother whispering “let him see it, let him see what it cost us” to his father when she knew he could hear her.

“Tell me first,” George pleads.

Dream shakes his head no. “I can’t.”

“Why not?” George presses, leaning closer so their noses almost touch, almost.

Some sort of chemical in his bloodstream, some sort of shift in the night sky, or divine courage, or something, something, eating up at the space inside of his chest. He’s sick of the secrets, sick of truths shrouded in lies, delivered to him half-obsured.

“I can’t,” Dream repeats. “I just don’t know what you’re going to say to me once you hear.”

“I won’t say anything,” George is begging now. “I won’t tell anyone.”

“Then tell me first.”

The silence is telling.

George has an idea. He’s unsure how Dream will react to it, but given that the two of them have lied for each other, hurt each other, he’s willing to take his chances in regards to intensity. George would never in a thousand years describe himself as bold, but he would definitely describe himself as impulsive. So he takes one of Dream’s hands, and presses it against his own neck.

“What are you doing?” Dream asks, jerking his hand away in confusion.

“If I do something weird, you can just—” he mimics squeezing something with his own hands, and Dream is already shaking his head no.

“I don’t want to hurt you, don’t be ridiculous,” his words are sharp.

“You won’t, because— I just think you’re too good to have done something really bad. So just—” he takes Dream’s hand again, watches for hesitation.

When it doesn’t come, he places the palm of Dream’s hand against his neck again. “Tell me.”

“George,” Dream starts. “I don’t—I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t,” George says in full confidence. “This is just for your own peace of mind.”

“I don’t need to have your neck in my hands just to feel some sort of peace of mind while telling you something,” Dream tells him.

“Okay. You can move it away if you’d feel more comfortable,” George responds, leaning backwards.

Dream swallows hard. He doesn’t move his hand.

“I’m not going to do anything,” he says again. “Even if you— I just don’t want you to—”

His hands move from George’s neck to his scalp, thumbs, pressed to the lobes of his ears. He leans in close, and for a moment George thinks he’s going to kiss him. Instead he just presses their foreheads together, hands trembling, before he pulls the two of them apart.

This is the part where George is supposed to feel guilty.

“I just— I don’t—I used to keep a personal diary, back at home.”

Everything inside of George buzzes in pride, basks in the glory of being the one that Dream tells this information to. His mind reminds him that after he finishes, George will have to tell him why he is here as well.

What if Dream wants him gone?

“I wouldn’t keep it under the floorboards, or anything,” he smiles, boyish. “Just in my bottom drawer. I’d just talk about my day, talk about the things I’d seen that I’d liked in it.”

It’s sweet.

“Important dates.”

Dream’s thumb smooths over his eyebrow, hands trembling.

“Girls.”

George swallows hard, tries not to look so guilty.

“Boys.”

Silence.

George doesn’t dare ask anything, doesn’t dare breathe, in the case that he disturbs the balance of some divine force, ends up asking something incriminating.

“My father found it,” Dream’s voice shakes. “He wasn’t happy.”

George doesn't speak, doesn't dare speak in the case that he is wrong.

"About the boys."

Suddenly, the hands retract themselves. Dream hides them under his thighs as he stares at a loose thread hanging from his trousers, and George is left reeling from information he has just learned.

"Dream," George starts, but Dream cuts him off.

"Don't," his voice trembles, like he is not used to using it. "Don't."

He feels for him. George would not by any means describe himself as someone who has come to terms with every part of himself in regards to that, but at the very least he's past lying to himself about wanting a white picket fence and a wife waiting for him in the evenings.

"Dream."

"I don't want you to stop touching me," Dream wraps his arms around himself, and George shifts closer. "I don't want— I like the way your hands feel. I don't think I've ever had that, with anyone."

The air hums around them, and some celestial force bigger than the two of them forces a shift in the Earth around them, pushes George towards him, closer, closer.

"I don't mean like— I mean that you're gentle with me," Dream's voice falters at the end, like he is admitting something out loud he has never admitted before. "Nobody has ever been gentle with me."

George wants to reach out and grab him, pull him close to his chest.

"Dream," George says his name again, holding out his arms.

Dream looks at him, wary, doesn't move. George shifts closer.

"Dream," George says again. "It's okay, I promise it's okay."

Dream doesn't move for a moment, before finally shifting in George's direction, letting George take him into his arms. They don't move. They don't speak. Finally, Dream breathes something out against the skin of George's neck.

"You have to tell me why you're here," Dream reminds him. "You have to tell me too." George is dreading it a little less. Dream shudders against him, and he wishes that he went first, to save Dream all of the worry.

"I get lonely, sometimes," George prefaces. "Back home. It's just— I get lonely."

Dream doesn't respond for a beat, two, before he nods against George.

"Don't really get on well with the girls," he says, moving a hand up and down Dream's back in small circles.

He feels Dream go still against him, and he's not sure if now is the time for the full story.

"Caught me with a boy," he finishes, and Dream bolts up into a sitting position.

He looks upset. "You don't have to make fun of me."

George frowns in confusion. "I'm not."

"You are," Dream accuses, and George watches the tendon in his hand flex, the tension in his neck return. "You're saying it because I'm saying it."

"Dream," George says in disbelief. "You can't be serious."

"I'm not stupid," Dream starts. "I know what—"

"Why would I make fun of you for this?" George asks, suddenly hurt. "Why would I even joke—do you think I *want* to be like this?"

The hum of the heater behind them. The rain tap tap taps on the windows. Dream stares at him. George stares right back, along the hallows of his cheeks, lower lash line, crow's feet.

"You're gay," Dream whispers, and George's throat closes up. "Like me."

"Like you," George repeats, squeezing his hand for good measure.

There is weight George wasn't even aware he was carrying being unloaded off his shoulders, dissolving into the air around him. Dream presses his forehead to George's shoulder, sighs heavy in relief. George holds him while the world stands still, while everything else ceases to exist for a brief moment in time.

"I feel so lonely, here," Dream whispers. "I don't— I wish you'd come here earlier."

"Here now," George says back, tracing the line connecting Dream's shoulder to his neck with his finger, jaw, cheekbone, the bridge of his nose.

The lightbulb flickers. Something shifts. Dream looks at him with wide eyes, and George looks back, desperately wanting to know what he's thinking. He shifts to kneel on the duvet, and something crinkles underneath him. He shifts back, startled, and Dream looks at him, embarrassed.

"Sorry, was reading before," he says, flushing red again, colourful and lively and George hates that they know each other better, hates that the stars have aligned to put the two of them in the same place, hates that Dream is strong where he isn't and that he can lie where Dream can't. The nail presses itself into the lid of the coffin. George will be leaving here, just as ungodly as he came.

"What were you reading?" he asks, going to take the page from Dream's hand, but Dream holds it over his head, leans back grinning.

George moves before he even knows what he's doing, arms caging Dream in, knee between Dream's thighs.

Dream's hand tosses the page to the side.

A beat. Two. George's heart, rattling around in his chest, rabid.

Forehead to forehead.

Cheek, lashes slotting into each other. Noses pressed together.

A beat. Another.

Something pulls the two of them together. Mouth, teeth, gravity dissolving. Dream's lips are chapped against his, and then he's leaning forward, toppling the two of them down to the bed. He

inhales, and it feels like Dream, exhales, and it feels like Dream, sickeningly slow and stiff and different to anything else he has felt before. When he pulls away, Dream is still staring at him, wide eyes and mouth agape, crimson cheeked and messy haired, and then he's grabbing George by the collar, and they're mouth to mouth again, slow and messy as everything else around them collapses in on itself, dying stars and drywall crumbling, nothing left but him, Dream, the two of them pressed together.

Chapter End Notes

comment please

sublimation

Chapter Summary

When the Bad Thing happened, I saw every blade.
And every year I find out what they've done to us, I shed another skin.
I get closer to open air; true north.

Lord, if I say Bless the cold water you throw on my face,
does that make me a costume party. Am I greedy for comfort
if I ask you not to kill my friends; if I beg you to press
your heel against my throat—not enough to ruin me,
but just so—just so I can almost see your face—

- Franny Choi, Catastrophe is next to Godliness

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream kisses him slow, hands hovering over George's waist for a moment, like he isn't sure he's allowed to touch, before he finally takes the fabric of George's shirt in his fists and uses it to tug him closer. George pulls himself up for air before the two of them are pressed together again. Dream kisses him like the world is going to end, teeth knocking into each other as the desperation simmers low in George's belly, and *God*, he feels like he's finally come up for air after being stuck underwater for centuries.

When they finally pull apart, and George looks down at Dream under him, mouth pink and lips glistening, flushed red cheeks and dark eyes and jaw agape like he can't quite believe what just happened, George wants to swoop back down and kiss him stupid again.

He does.

Dream's hands move up and down his sides, as George groans against him, and Dream shivers as he pulls him closer. The room is hot, and humid, and George doesn't let himself think about anything other than himself, Dream, the two of them together in this hellish scape of deception where nothing is certain, nothing is promised to him but this, the two of them together.

Dream pushes him up first, breathes heavy as he props himself up against the wall, hands still firmly holding onto George's hips. For a moment, it is silent. George wonders if he acted too brashly, read something wrong and now Dream hates him.

Dream's hand rests on George's cheek. Dream looks at him, still stuck in some sort of haze of stupefaction. He's looking at George with a kind of softness that George didn't know could be given to him anymore. It makes his throat close up and his stomach drop.

Dream exhales, breathes life back into the world around them. "Hi."

George's hands find their way to Dream's shoulders and he pulls the two of them chest to chest as he squeezes his eyes shut. "Hello."

He feels like he's been torn open, like the contents of his heart have spilled out of him and have been hung out for display. He's going to be sick. He clings onto Dream's shoulders tighter, and he's leaning in close again. Dream's eyelids flutter.

"George," Dream whispers, unmoving. "You kissed me."

"Yeah," George whispers. "Do you want— Do you wanna stop?"

Dream shakes his head no vehemently, fingers pressing into George's ribcage harder for a moment. George likes it, considers asking him to hold on tighter for just a moment again. It feels like a claim, feels like it matters that it's *George* that kissed Dream, not just any warm body with a wet mouth.

"George," Dream says quietly, voice hoarse, and he tilts his chin forward just a little. "Can you kiss me again, please?"

George feels his tongue go heavy in his mouth for a moment, before he comes to his senses and nods, before leaning forward to press their lips together for just a second. They pull apart. Dream smiles at him.

The room feels like it is full of golden light.

"That was nice," Dream says, casting his eyes towards the wall behind George. "I— That was really nice."

"Yeah?" George asks as he presses another kiss to just the corner of Dream's mouth, another down his jaw, before hovering his lips over where Dream's pulse is.

Dream hums, hands gripping George's hips tighter for a moment before he lifts George up to adjust his position. "Yeah. S' nice."

George wants to so desperately sink his teeth into Dream's neck, but he knows that he shouldn't at the risk of leaving marks.

"Your lashes are tickling me," Dream murmurs. "Feels funny."

George goes to move so that they're face to face again, but one of Dream's hands splays itself across his back, keeping him in place.

"Didn't say bad funny," Dream continues, thumb reaching out to press into one of the ridges of George's spine.

He closes his eyes, lets himself bask in the moment, but he never does too well when he's left with only his own thoughts. He remembers the events that preceded, remembers the world outside of the four walls and the floor, remember that just down the stairs there are grave consequences for being found. He swallows hard as he thinks of someone walking in— *Fuck, did they even lock the door?* Terror in his throat as he cranes his neck over to see if they did. He can't seem to make it out with his eyes. Then he remembers the stairwell, remembers the tops of Dream's knuckles going white and thinks of Thomas telling and getting the both of them in trouble, keeping George here for longer than he means to be, thinks of everyone finding out, talking about it, wondering why George had stood there in silence, connecting the dots on what he feels for Dream— what Dream potentially feels for him. Fuck, what did Dream feel for him? Maybe he'd jumped the gun, kissed him too soon, destroyed the only friendship he has left.

"Dream," George starts, and he sounds more panicked than he means to. "I haven't forgotten what

you just did. In the stairwell. We need to talk about it.”

Dream’s hands travel back to his waist. “Didn’t think you would.”

“Dream,” George groans as he finally pulls away to look him in the eye. “Why?”

“Why what?” Dream asks with a nonchalance George doesn’t understand.

“Why’d you *do* that?” George presses, as Dream’s eyes flicker down to look at his mouth.

“Do what?” Dream asks, grinning wide as though he’s proud.

George exhales in frustration.

“George,” Dream tries as he leans forward. “C’mon, don’t worry, it’ll be okay. I promise. Don’t spoil this. I promise everything will be alright tomorrow morning.”

George wants to argue that now is as good of a time as any to discuss Dream *blackmailing somebody*, which could end up getting him in a lot of trouble. Dream hates this place so much, and yet he seems so determined to anchor himself to it, close off any opportunity to get out of here by just keeping his head down and behaving. There’s a hand behind his head and he’s being laid down very gently, before there are two arms bracketing him in and dirty blonde hair brushing against his collarbones and lips pressed to his chin, trailing downwards towards his navel.

“George,” Dream says his name again and George makes himself push those thoughts away, forces himself to compartmentalise and forget and save the worrying for when he’s not underneath Dream. “It’s okay. I promise it’s okay.”

It isn’t, but George doesn’t let himself say anything about it for the rest of the night. Dream seems to sense he’s too out of it to talk, so he holds George’s hand and the two of them sit in comfortable silence. Dream breaths slow, George rests his head on his chest, as the time passes. He thinks some more, about what this means, what will happen, the seminary, the writing underneath the floorboards, if Dream knows just exactly how he feels.

“What’re you thinking?” Dream asks in a murmur, fingertips trailing up George’s arm. “D’you wanna go?”

“Nothing,” George whispers. “No.”

This is dangerous. It feels like being the only two on a lifeboat, stranded in the middle of the ocean as the waves rock them back and forth. George almost wants to be swallowed whole by the water, taken to the bottom. His lungs burn. Dream is so warm against him. The absence of touch makes him feel like he might freeze to death. Everything is terrifying.

He stays in place. The two of them fall asleep, tangled together.

He expects the world to end the morning after. He’s sure he looks tired the morning after in the kitchens, where Dream is cutting strips of dough for their pie. When Sister Catherine walks past the two of them, he half expects her to go red in anger, humiliate the two of them for what they’ve done. It doesn’t happen.

“Hello George,” She tells him brightly. “Happy Christmas Eve. Are you doing alright?”

George nods. “I’m alright.”

When David and Thomas slink into the kitchens while George is trying to braid three of the skinnier strips to place around the border, he finds himself subconsciously leaning towards Dream, and doesn’t dare look away from the crust. When he finally musters up the courage to peek, he’s relieved to see that there isn’t any visible bruising on Thomas’s cheek, at least not underneath this lighting. He presses his hands together extra hard during grace, even though he’s not really thinking about what he’s supposed to be thinking about. His mind wanders back to Dream, back to the way he’d looked at George with wide eyed amazement and the way his hands feel when they’re pressed against his chest, the way the bed dipped around them. Dream, him, togetherness.

When they get back upstairs, Dream slams the door shut and grins at George. “Told you. No problems.”

“Still,” George mumbles. “Shouldn’t— I don’t want you to get in trouble.”

Dream waves him off. “It’s not a big deal.”

“Seemed like a big deal a few weeks ago,” George hesitantly brings it up. “I just— I don’t want to —”

“George,” Dream says his name again, and George really thinks he needs to start warning him when he plans to, especially if he’s going to say it like that. “I promise I am not as nearly upset about getting in trouble as you think I am.”

“Still,” George crosses his arms over his chest. “I want— the ski trip is so soon, I don’t want— I know you were looking forward to going, and I would just hate to be the reason you couldn’t.”

“I’ll be alright,” Dream promises. “And I’ll be there, I promise.”

“I don’t want you to miss out on things you want to do because— I don’t—” George doesn’t know how to put it into words, and he’s not sure if Dream is even capable of understanding.

George had spent his entire childhood fearing the fire of hell, determined to not end up there. The terror that had burrowed itself into his chest, made a home inside of him, grew larger and larger by the day. Everything had been terrifying, until it wasn’t. Until he had figured out it wasn’t for certain. Until everything he had been warned against; temptation and external forces that would be determined to lead him astray had somehow become nothing more than the world around him. The terror leaves. The void takes its place.

Sometimes George wants to be afraid again. Sometimes he thinks it would be better than the state of uncertainty he always seems to be stuck in, time and time again. Maybe he would be happy to accept a fate of eternal agony if he was given a guarantee that it was what was waiting for him. Maybe if George knew the price of that feeling, he would be able to weigh his options, maybe even be more than happy to be damned forever if it meant he could have something like that, even for just a moment.

Instead, he’s left to his own devices, meant to weigh his options and decide whether he wants to deny the divine. Instead, he’s left with no proof of the divine at all, and the world around him

continues to move while he sits in his own sickbed of irresolution.

“Dream,” George whispers, looking up at him.

Dream looks back, and George’s stomach twists in delight as the ink of his irises bleed into the rings of hazel and gold. He almost shivers as Dream’s hands find his, and George squeezes them, and it feels close to holiness.

They’re mouth to mouth again, moving backwards.

George isn’t sure about divinity, isn’t sure about God or some omnipotent creator, but he’s sure about Dream. He’s sure that Dream is pushing him backwards towards the bed, sure that it’s Dream’s hand behind his head as he’s placed against the wall, Dream handling him with a carefulness that George feels could break him far worse than any holy violence. George would tear himself to pieces, limb by limb, unravel each and every one of his own veins and cough up his lungs, become an undoing of himself, just to feel the heat settle into his stomach. It’s cruel that they have to pull apart for air, cruel that they’ve got to be quiet.

“George,” Dream whispers when George’s hands find the hem of his shirt. “Can we— *fuck*, just— Can we slow down?”

George kisses the tip of his nose in apology, moves his hands back around over his shoulders, settles his fingertips on the back of Dream’s neck.

“Yeah,” he breathes out, before Dream kisses him again. “Sorry.”

“No, s’okay,” Dream mumbles, hands gripping George’s hips like his life depends on it, and George is dizzy on something he can’t even describe in words. “Just— *fuck*, it’s a lot. Wanna just — take it a little slower.”

George hums out a noise of agreement. His head hits the pillow. Dream’s hands are around his wrists. They kiss slow, then fast, then slow again.

The mass moves too slow for George’s liking. He has to hide his face behind his clasped hands when Dream speaks, afraid that he’s going red. A Christmas tree sits in the corner of the entrance. He helps Sister Catherine take it down the day after. They make small talk as they do.

“Father Joseph says that one of his friends wants to speak with you,” she says, placing the golden ornaments back into their boxes.

George swallows, pauses. “Am I in trouble?”

“Oh, yes,” Sister Catherine says as she tosses a silver ornament into the box a foot away from her. “Big trouble, George. They’re taking you away to somewhere worse than here, and they’re going to keep you there for seven years.”

When she looks up at him and sees that he’s gone visibly pale, she laughs. “I’m joking, George. No, he’s just going to provide guidance. Your mother called and asked if you were still interested in the seminary.”

George’s heart stops beating as his limbs freeze up. “She called?”

“She did,” Sister Catherine says as she goes on with sorting out the ornaments like nothing of significance has happened. “I think the no phone calls rule is a bit stupid, if I’m being honest. Don’t think any of you are— I don’t know.” She clears her throat. “I suppose it’s the rules. No matter. But she asked how you were doing. I’m not supposed to tell you this, but people go home for Christmas sometimes, and since you’re not here for anything mandated by the courts, there’s no harm in letting you know, right? That she called? Our little secret?”

George nods furiously. “Yeah, it’s fine. I won’t tell. What did she say?”

He almost doesn’t want to hear it. He knows that whatever she has to say, she’s probably right. She’s always been good at calling out the worst of George.

“She was just checking in, seeing you were doing alright,” she says idly. “Heard we gave you a roommate and was a little upset, but once we explained to her all the good things you’ve been doing here—”

George cringes internally.

“She was very pleased,” Sister Catherine says, finally finished. “I’ll put the rest away, you go up and get some rest. Tomorrow, the buses leave at noon, so be sure to be ready by then.”

George thanks her, hurries off into the stairwell, stares at the first two steps for a moment before coming to his senses. Nothing bad is going to happen, nothing will happen, he’s certain of it. He still runs up as fast as he can.

Dream is reading when he gets back. He looks up at George and smiles softly, and George lets himself indulge again, in a fantasy where he gets to have this every day, without the fear in his belly accompanying the warmth in his chest.

“Hi,” George says as he kicks off his shoes, walks towards where he’s sitting.

Dream scoots over for him, and George takes his spot next to him.

“Are you excited for tomorrow?” George says as he puts his head on his shoulder.

Dream nods, eyes not leaving the page. “Yeah.”

“What’re you reading?”

Dream folds the page in half, tosses it towards his desk. It lands on the floor instead. “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” George repeats. “D’you want me to—”

“It’s just something I wrote,” Dream says, hands pulling George onto his lap easily, like George weighs nothing.

“Didn’t know you wrote,” George notes, tracing his fingers over Dream’s collarbone.

“S’nothing,” Dream repeats. “It’s not— it’s a little embarrassing.”

“I’m sure it’s not,” George reassures him.

Dream shrugs. “It’s not— I don’t know. Sometimes I feel like when I listen to myself think, it’s like— I don’t know. I can’t understand what I mean sometimes.”

George nods, tries to follow along. “That’s alright. It happens.”

“It makes me upset,” Dream admits, voice going small. “I just— God, I don’t know. I don’t usually get too far along. Maybe one day I’ll finish something, put it into words properly. Be happy with it.”

“Would you show me?” George asks quietly after a moment, his thumb reaching out to press just below the corner of Dream’s mouth, and he feels like he could get drunk off the way his mouth opens, slowly, the sharp ends of his bottom teeth on display.

“Yeah,” Dream mumbles, and then his eyes focus on George’s, hungry. “What’re you doing?”

George shrugs. “I dunno.”

Dream’s hands, on his waist, hot touch. Everything he’s thought he’s known about the worst of himself ending up correct. Being okay with it. He almost wants the walls to cave in, wants the world to come crumbling down, die preserved as this version of him. Maybe George is a liar. Maybe this life has made him one. He doesn’t care. The tangible melts away when Dream is all over him again, and for the first time, he feels grounded in something. Maybe it’s not faith. Maybe it’s not worship. The void in his chest closes up every time Dream kisses him, over and over and over. Every piece of him that had been reduced into starmatter pulls itself closer, becomes one brilliant ball of light instead of scattered nothingness. Dream’s mouth against his. It feels adjacent to being whole.

Chapter End Notes

that is a lot of words to say ur horny george. thankxs

[please go check out this art by emlarr25 of the fic :D](#)

[please go check out this art by OguraNina of the fic :D](#)

tysm for reading pls lmk what u thought in the commentzz see u in the next one!!

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tectonic shifts

Chapter Summary

'In life, love gnawed my skin
To this white bone;
What love did then, love does now:
Gnaws me through.'

'What love,' asked Father Shawn, 'but too great love
Of flawed earth—flesh could cause this sorry pass?
Some damned condition you are in:
Thinking never to have left the world, you grieve
As though alive, shriveling in torment thus
To atone as shade for sin that lured blind man.'

- Sylvia Plath, Dialogue Between Ghost and Priest

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream is quiet on the bus ride there.

George tries his best to prompt him to talk, but he sits with his forehead pressed against the glass of the window, and receives nothing more than mumbled one word responses. He brushes his pinkie against the side of George's thigh and offers a weak smile, before going back to staring at the passing trees.

"Are you excited?"

He turns his head to look at George, cheek still pressed to the window. "Yeah."

"I'm not very good at skiing," he tries, but Dream is already turning his back away from him.

He wonders if he's done something wrong in the short time between last night and right now, but Dream's hand reaches for his, palms hot against George's fingers. He squeezes it tightly twice before letting go, and it soothes George's anxieties for the moment.

Nothing is wrong, he tries to convince himself. He still can't shake the sinking feeling of dread in his stomach.

Nobody else speaks to them.

When the bus stops, Sister Catherine stands and tells them all that they're not to go anywhere alone, and should any one of them end up breaking a rule, everyone would have to go home. They lug sleeping bags over their shoulders and trudge towards the chalet, where one of the employees leads a group of them up the stairs to a large empty carpeted room. She tells them to take off their shoes before entering and lay out their sleeping bags there, and then to wash up before coming down to the foyer for a welcome meeting. Sister Catherine reminds them that they're only sleeping here for one night, and not to put too many things out as the facility isn't responsible for lost items.

George follows behind Dream, sets his things down next to him. They make their way back down.

The lady in the foyer groups them by experience, and assigns each of the groups an instructor. George struggles with the buckles of his ski boots, has to use both his palms to get them to snap closed. He waddles outside to Dream, who's chatting with the instructor about something.

"You alright?" he asks as he turns to George, smiling with amusement at the way George sticks out his arms in an attempt to catch his balance.

"It's been a while," George mutters in his own defence. "I'm just getting used to it."

Dream rolls his eyes and grins. "Sure."

They make their way up the hill slowly. George tries to square out his own breathing as they do, breath fogging up the air in front of him.

Dream still keeps a considerable distance between the two of them, and George can't help but feel anxious, even though nothing is wrong, Dream didn't say anything was wrong, and there's no point in working himself up over nothing. It's a beautiful day. The sun beats down onto the fresh snow in the distance. There are people standing by the side of the foot of the hill, cheering as their friends come down. George sees a woman extend her ski pole to a small child, who grabs onto it and looks up at her, beaming. He feels this odd bitterness rise up in his throat at the sight, so he turns the other way, choosing to push the visual out of his mind.

The rest of the group decides to go up to the intermediate hill. George decides to start at the beginner's level one, already feeling sick when the lift has brought them halfway up. Dream is sitting next to him, still quiet, but he must see the way George is going white as he looks down at the distance between his feet and the ground.

"You're okay," Dream encourages him. "Just don't— don't look down. Or you'll feel like you're up too high."

George exhales sharply, closes his eyes. "I know. I know."

"We're almost at the first stop," Dream continues. "Just look right ahead."

He feels embarrassed, but not embarrassed enough to try and fake bravery. Dream slips off the lift at the same stop as him, warns George that it's very easy to fall and slip underneath the guardrails. George tries not to think of himself skiing right through the wired fence guarding the steep drop, falling into the clutches of the leafless and brittle looking branches, that surely don't have a chance at supporting his weight.

"Stop thinking," Dream whispers, and George does his best to move as little as possible as the safety rail is lifted and they slip off the bench. George clutches Dream's arm the moment it's safe to do so, exhales sharply as they get ready to go down.

"Scared?" Dream asks quietly, as George shakes his head no, the helmet suddenly feeling heavier on his head.

"Just hot," he breathes out, touching his gloved palm to his nose. "But cold at the same time."

Dream laughs. "Yeah. Your nose is bright red."

George huffs as he turns his head away and Dream laughs at him.

“C’mon, it’s cute,” he teases. “You look like Rudolph.”

“Stop,” George groans as he feels his cheeks heat up, shuffling closer to the edge of the hill.

He turns back to look at Dream, motions him forward.

It works as a distraction. Dream skis forward, offers his arm to cling to but only if George promises not to make the two of them crash.

George squeezes his eyes shut as the wind blows against his face, before they finally push off together. George holds onto Dream’s hand for dear life, and miraculously, they make it through the first slope.

They aren’t as lucky during the second. George points his skis too far apart and falls to the ground. Dream laughs before he offers him a hand. George pulls him down too, and they end up on top of each other, snow pressed against his ears.

Dream’s expression shifts immediately, before he rolls off him. “We gotta get up.”

“Sorry,” George says quietly, struggling to climb to his feet.

They walk in silence for a few moments, and George feels that something has shifted. Dream’s jaw clenches with every step, and George wonders what he could be thinking about.

“You alright?” he asks quietly, afraid that somehow the wind might carry his voice, afraid that somehow they’ll get caught and everything will go to shit.

“I’m still going to be here,” Dream says plainly. “After two months. After you leave.”

George swallows hard as they continue forward.

“Sorry,” Dream suddenly says. “That’s not your problem.”

That isn’t where George wants this conversation to end in the slightest.

“No, it is,” he tries. “You can— You can talk to me about it, if you want to—”

“George,” Dream cuts him off, turning to him for a moment, standing still. “It’s alright. I don’t want to talk about it.”

George wants to say that it probably is a good idea if they talk about it, but he can’t come up with anything to say that’ll remedy the situation. He’ll fix it, he wants to think. He’ll come up with something. It’s going to turn out okay, because he can’t bear thinking of the alternative.

How are you going to be able to do that? Something jaded and twisted whispers in his ears, sinister. They can’t hear the people laughing, can’t hear the people cheering at the bottom of the hill during this part of the slope. *Some fucking nerve you have, trying to promise Dream that you can get him out of here*, the voice in his head reminds him. *You couldn’t even get yourself out of coming here.*

He shudders.

Nothing but George, Dream, the disturbed silence. Nothing but George, the most terrified parts of himself, Dream, the sound of his skis dragging through the snow. Nothing but George, the most terrifying parts of himself, everything he’s afraid of losing, and the sound of his skis dragging through the snow.

They drink coffee in the evening, eat dinner by a table overlooking the smaller hills. When everyone rushes out to ski again, the two of them make their way upstairs. George drops the curtains.

“Dream,” George starts, but Dream shakes his head no.

“I don’t— I’m not ready to talk about any of that,” he says firmly. “And it’s— it’s complicated, so I don’t think— sorry for bringing it up. I don’t know what I was saying. I don’t want to talk about it.”

The room is silent for a moment, before Dream goes to fiddle with the lock, only to return dismayed.

“Door doesn’t lock,” Dream announces sadly as he sits down next to him. “It’s just closed.”

George nods, eyes shifting left and right. “Do you know if— if everyone is outside?”

“Yeah, I saw Sister Catherine and the priest chaperone heading out towards the lifts. Don’t think there’s anyone here.”

Nobody here. Just the two of them.

“We’ve got the place to ourselves then,” George notes.

“Ourselves, and a dozen sleeping bags,” Dream agrees, sitting down across from him.

It looks like there’s something he wants to say. George waits, but when he doesn’t speak, he places a hand on Dream’s shoulder.

“Everything okay?”

Dream nods, faraway look still in his eyes. “We should have at least an hour to ourselves.”

“An hour,” George echoes. “Just us.”

“We just have to be a little quiet,” Dream thinks for a moment, before pulling a bandaid from his pocket.

George watches him adhere it to his thumb. “What are you doing?”

“If they come in and see us close, we can just say I cut myself accidentally and needed help putting on a bandaid.”

“If they see us close,” George repeats. “You planned for this?”

Dream shrugs, goes red. “I mean. I sort of assumed.”

George grins as Dream leans forward and closes the gap between them, interlocks their fingers with his right hand. He holds the back of George’s head with the other as he pushes George onto his back.

George groans as Dream grabs one of his legs, pushes it to the side to crawl between, and kisses

him harder into the floor.

“Dream,” George whispers, arms wrapped around Dream’s neck. “Nobody is going to believe I was helping you with a bandaid if they find us like this.”

“We’ll just have to be quick then,” Dream whispers, before moving his mouth to George’s neck, hooking a finger to the collar of George’s shirt and tugging it downwards.

“Don’t wanna accidentally leave any marks where people can see,” he explains, before his teeth bump against George’s collarbone.

His mind goes dizzy as Dream tentatively presses a kiss to his chest. George involuntarily rolls his hips, apologises when he knocks against Dream’s stomach.

“It’s okay,” Dream breathes out, moving up to kiss George on the mouth again.

“You wanna do anything else?” George asks, hand going to Dream’s arm, thumb pressing little circles into the crook of his elbow. “It’s okay if you don’t want to.”

Dream’s eyes go wide, and George wants him. Still, he swallows down the lump in his throat, waits for an answer.

“It’s okay,” George goes to start, but Dream swoops down to catch his mouth in a kiss again, catching George’s bottom lip with his teeth.

“I want to,” he pants as they pull away. “I just— I haven’t done anything like this before.”

George’s eyes widen as he goes to sit up. “Are you—”

“No, like I’ve— only with girls,” Dream admits, looking back at the door nervously. “I wouldn’t—I want to, but I wouldn’t know how to.”

A concoction of anxiety and some sick sense of pride courses through his veins. He doesn’t let himself wallow in that feeling for much longer, afraid of what other ideas it might invite into his mind.

George cups his face with both hands, presses his thumbs into Dream’s cheeks. Dream smiles down sheepishly at him, and George wants him for the first time all over again, in ways he can’t even think about without feeling hot shame.

“It’s okay,” George whispers. “I can—I can show you.”

Dream looks around, bewildered. “Here?”

“Everyone else is out,” George shrugs as his heart begins to pump kerosene through his arteries. “We can check downstairs again, but this session still has—” he glances towards the clock, “forty five minutes left. We can finish before they get back.”

Dream looks at him with an expression he can’t read, pupils dark as he looks up at George.

“We don’t have to do everything,” George rushes out to say. “I feel like—I’d rather do that in our room, but if you want—”

“I want,” Dream cuts him off. “I just—you’ll have to tell me what to do.”

The air feels static. George feels like if so much as exhales the room will go up in flames, take his

body as collateral. Heat spots flicker in his vision. Dream leans forward, lips red as he presses them to George's, mouth to mouth, matchstick to fuse.

Dream kisses him.

It's nothing short of incendiary. Firecrackers go off in his stomach. Hands wander this time.

Dream's palms pressed against his chest, sear themselves into his memory. George's hands settle on his waist. He pulls the two of them together, revels in the way Dream groans in his ear before kissing him again. George's hands find the zipper of Dream's jeans. They pull apart for a brief moment, lock eyes while the world melts away.

"Can I?" George whispers.

Dream nods two times, before looking at the clock nervously.

"Relax, I promise we'll be done before they get back," George soothes, despite the jittery feeling in his chest. "Nothing's going to happen. If you want to wait until tomorrow, when we get back to—"

"No," Dream rushes out to say, exhaling sharply. "No, I really want to. Right now."

George doesn't want to get caught, but the thrill of knowing that they're not supposed to be here, not supposed to be doing this, washes over him, and his fingers move to hook underneath the waistband of Dream's boxers, when Dream kisses him again.

"Dream," George groans. "How am I supposed to get you off if you won't let me focus?"

"I'm helping you get off," Dream mumbles.

"No, I'm helping you get off," George whispers back. "Just— don't worry about me, okay? Let me— just let me."

"George," Dream whispers as he presses his forehead into the crook of George's neck. "Can you— just want you to look at me."

"Okay," George replies as Dream sits back up again. "Just need you to—"

He leans forward, guides Dream onto his back and crawls between his legs, kisses him softly once, twice, before ghosting a hand over the space between his legs. "Can I—"

"Yes," Dream groans, bucking his hips upwards, before his face goes red. "Sorry, I don't—"

"Don't say sorry," George insists, kissing the tip of his nose, and Dream goes quiet. "I'll tell you if I have a problem with anything. Just relax. Let me make you feel good."

They're free falling through dimensions, as time warps and wrinkles and shifts around them, and George is used to quick, used to hot and messy and clothes on, but not like this. Not with anyone who looks like Dream, not with anyone who's looked at him like he meant something, like this meant something.

Did this mean something?

He doesn't think about it, in case Dream doesn't feel the same way. It seems like an awful question to spring in the middle of this. Even if it didn't mean anything, George can deal with the aftermath later. All he's been doing as of lately is dealing with aftermath. He thinks he should get to indulge in this.

“George,” Dream’s head falls into the junction of his neck.

George watches him release most of the tension in his shoulders. He kisses him again to melt the rest of it away. He rolls his hips against Dream’s again just to test the waters, just to listen to him make that same soft noise again. The ground shifts.

He kisses the corner of Dream’s jaw again as he reaches into his briefs, rolls his thumb over the head of Dream’s cock experimentally.

“George,” Dream breathes his name into the air, and it feels like the opposite of sacrilege.

“You ever done this before?” George asks, and Dream shakes his head no.

“Haven’t— just had normal sex, nothing— not normal, I mean like—” he inhales sharply as George rolls his thumb over the head again, and George watches him clench his jaw as he moves to fuck up into George’s fist. “Yeah, just not like—”

“It’s okay,” George whispers, moving his hand up and down the length of him agonisingly slow. “Just wanna make sure that everything feels good for you.”

“It does,” Dream assures him, voice still soft and strained at the corners, his hand gripping George’s shoulder like a vice. “*Just— fuck*, hard to stay quiet. Are we doing more?”

More. George swallows hard, pushes the image out of his brain before the colours even manage to arrange themselves into figures, and he’s got to have an unholy amount of self restraint to be able to do that.

“Don’t have time,” George whispers. “Just this right now, okay? We can— we can talk more back in our room,” George stutters when Dream throws his head and he gets a good look at him, flushed with colour, lip trembling like he’s going to cry.

“Never— fuck, I don’t— it’s never felt like—” Dream mouths at George’s neck, teeth scraping against the skin briefly before he remembers to reign himself in.

Dream exhales as his knees shake.

“You’re big,” George whispers, as he moves his hand a little faster, stopping for a brief moment to stroke just the head again.

Dream exhales, a soft noise escaping his throat, and George feels like he could get high off the way he sounds.

“Really big,” George continues.

“George,” Dream warns, voice dipping lower. “Don’t. Not here.”

George grins as he speeds up, watches Dream’s back arch towards him. “Why not?”

“Because,” Dream breathes out. “I’m having ideas that we don’t have time for.”

“What ideas?” George stops stroking for a moment just to watch Dream squirm, watch him tense his shoulders and bite his lip before relaxing again.

“I’ll tell you later,” Dream promises, and he looks at George with big glossed over eyes, and George kisses him again before moving his hand faster. “Back at home.”

Dream's forehead falls to George's shoulder as he cums. George can feel his breathing even out, can feel the magnitude of his heartbeat, can feel every shift and crackle inside of Dream's veins. They sit like that for a few moments, and it feels sorrowfully human. George braces himself for the self-loathing, but it doesn't come. Dream pulls away first, goes to touch George, but George stops him.

"I don't think we have time," he whispers apologetically. "I think you should go get changed, and then we should— there's still an hour left until we have to meet everyone in the foyer, we could go down the small slope one more time."

Dream frowns as he goes to fix his hair. "I'm sorry, I wanted to—"

Don't be sorry," George insists. "We can— it's not a big deal. Really. We've got the whole weekend to sit in our room after this."

Dream's eyes widen for a moment before he bites at the inside of his own cheek, nods twice. "Okay. More, then. At home."

"Yeah, back at— back in the room." George watches his legs shake as he gets to his feet, bites back a grin. "You alright?"

Dream nods, still coming out of his stupor. "Yeah, I think— yeah. Thank you."

He bends down to kiss George again, hovers for a moment as they're both pulling away, before he grabs his backpack and heads to the bathrooms.

It should feel like some form of release, like some sort of cord has snapped between the two of them, should give them the go ahead to mellow out. George feels like he's on fire, feels like he's opened up the gates to something brand new. He presses two fingers to the space between his shoulder and his neck, trying to replicate the way Dream's chin felt digging into the bone. He wants to stay here, just a little longer, wants to hold Dream in the afterglow, talk about what all of this means.

There's noise coming from the foyer, and George busies himself with fixing the strap of his backpack, in case someone comes in to ask what he's doing. Nobody does.

George had known this would change something. He just hadn't known it would change it like *this*, so soon. Dream is quiet on the ski lift again, but it feels more deliberate. He can feel the guilt pooling in his gut, and sure, George can't remember a time in his life he *didn't* feel guilty, but this is different. He seems to be very deep into contemplating something. He hadn't seemed very happy the last time George had tried to press the truth out of him, so George doesn't bother him, content to sit in comfortable silence.

"George. What do you make of— what do you make of all this?"

Then, it feels like the whole world shatters.

George's gaze falls on the ends of his skis, the thirty feet drop beneath them. He thinks about shifting forward, slipping through the cracks and falling into the untouched snow below. He looks forward to the approaching slope, the darkness behind the fence as the snow comes down.

"What do you mean?" George asks, turning to look at Dream.

Dream looks back at him, the corners of his mouth tough as his chin juts out for a second. “Like— what does this mean?”

George tilts his head in confusion. “What do you mean, what does this mean?”

“What’re you— what’re you gonna do when all of this is over?” Dream gestures in the direction of the parking lot. “When you get out of here?”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” George admits.

The familiar swell of nausea in his stomach. The white noise in his ears, trembling of his fingers, familiar fear of the unknown. George knows nothing. He’s going into everything so blindly.

“I don’t know if I can ask this,” Dream admits as the wires holding up their chairlift quiver.

“You can ask,” George tells him, offering a soft smile of reassurance.

Dream closes his eyes, like this is some sort of familiar pain, something he has already mourned. “Are you still going to the seminary?”

Oh.

The sky cracks in two. The wind howls around them, bites at the cartilage of George’s ears. He’d been pushing that thought as far back as he possibly could, opting to ignore the inevitable fate of his life.

He hadn’t been thinking about that.

George swallows. “Yes.”

Dream presses his lips together and shakes his head, and George is ashamed, frustrated, upset, wishes he could crawl right out of his skin and fall into the abyss.

“Dream—”

“No,” Dream says. “I didn’t— no. I don’t want to talk about it, actually.”

“You have to understand— we have to talk about *something*, eventually—”

“What the fuck are we doing, George?” Dream asks, looking so hurt and betrayed that George wants to dissolve into the air, erase everything about his own existence.

“I thought we— I didn’t know we—” there’s nothing good he can say here, nothing that can make this better.

How can he make any of this better?

“I heard Father Joseph talking about your mentor to Sister Catherine yesterday, and I thought that — I thought maybe that you’d decided not to go,” Dream spits the words out like they feel bitter in his mouth. “But you’re— what are you planning to even do there? You’re not even—”

“I can find my way back,” George regrets it before he even says it, because Dream looks at him like he can’t believe the words that are coming out of his mouth.

“Back to what, George?” Dream asks, and George watches the space between his eyebrows furrow. “Back to a God you didn’t believe in in the first place?”

“I can believe in God,” George doesn’t even believe himself as the words come out of his mouth.

Dream is quiet for a moment, observes him. It feels like he’s being stripped naked underneath his eyes, like his soul is being poked at and protruded. George hates judgement, hates being looked at and observed under any capacity. He doesn’t want to think about this right now, talk about this right now.

“I don’t know what to even— George. You— then what are *we* doing?” Dream asks, and George’s heart aches as the desperation drips into his tone. “You’re gonna find God while you’re messing around with me? What does that make me, to you?”

George is quiet. Something. Everything. Too much and not enough. George doesn’t understand what Dream wants from him, so he’s not sure what he wants from Dream either.

Something tender, maybe. Some sort of understanding. What they’ve been doing this whole time. He’s not sure what name to give it.

“What is— what do you make of all this?” Dream repeats, voice cracking down the middle.

George wants the ground to split, He wants the ropes tethering this chairlift to the wires on his side to snap. He wants to disappear.

“What do you make of me?” It sounds like the words are being forcefully wrenched from Dream’s vocal chords, like they’re painful to put out into the open, like he’s the fractured ground swallowing George up in his mind.

George doesn’t have an answer to give. “I don’t know.”

It feels like the moment of silence after a natural disaster. George doesn’t know how to speak, forgets how to speak, to breathe and think and be a human being. He wants to be with Dream. He wants to go home, climb back into his childhood bed, wake up to his mother’s love. He wants to spend the evenings sitting on the floor, listening to Dream read. He wants to live his life out in the open.

He wants all of it. He’s not sure how those things slot together. He’s not sure if they can.

“I don’t know,” he repeats, and Dream shakes his head in disappointment.

He’s grateful that they’ve reached the top of the hill, grateful for the buffer of getting off and getting ready to go back down. When no great justification falls out of the sky in the minutes it takes for them to get to the edge of the slope, panic swells in his chest.

“This is the last run for the day, alright boys?” One of the women standing at the booth tells them. “Back to the chalet after this.”

“Yeah,” Dream tells them. “Thanks.”

George watches him adjust his helmet.

“Dream—”

“We gotta get down,” Dream cuts him off, and George can see he’s biting at the inside of his cheek.

“We have to talk about—”

“When we get down,” Dream cuts him off. “If you want my help, you can take my arm.”

He holds it out for George to take. George takes it, and doesn't know what else to do. He wants to apologise. He doesn't know what to do. *This is everything. I don't know how to say it.* They're quiet all the way down.

What is it to you? He wants to ask, but he doesn't want to face a reaction, so he doesn't. Cowardly, again. He'll be cowardly forever. He'll keep rolling his shoulders, letting the weight of his actions slip off his back and to the ground, claiming to be reborn every day for the rest of his life.

Dream sees right through it. He can feel him looking right through him, and God, he hates it. Dream had seen the best of him, clearly, if he'd bothered to give George the time of day. The real best of him, in union with the worst of him. And now he's left to look at George through the different refractions, different bits and pieces of the life he's lived, and see what he can find in the most stripped down version.

What am *I* to you? George would ask if he wasn't a coward.

He knows the answer. Maybe it was something different before, but now it's got to be nothing. Now that he's seen the worst of it, Dream has come to his senses, seen what George has known all along. There is no chance at salvation here, not from something holy, not even from something human.

He doesn't want to hear it. So he doesn't ask.

Chapter End Notes

tw: handjob scene o_O. tw: the word cock the word buldge

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marrow

Chapter Summary

I was very young when I was cracked open.
Some things you should let go of
Others you shouldn't
Views differ as to which
I keep hold of everything, just in case

- Emily Berry, Dear Boy

Chapter Notes

hey, i added around 1.5k words to the previous chapter a day ago so it would probably be a good idea to go reread if you're interested - the plot is still the same but there's some more introspection there :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They don't talk when they get down. They don't talk before bed. Dream sleeps with his back to George. The next morning, George is the last to rise, everyone else already having taken to the slopes. He sees Dream sitting at one of the tables, scribbling something onto a napkin. When he sees George, he offers him a weak smile, but George is a coward, so he turns his back to him and heads back upstairs, spends the rest of their time here staring at the ceiling.

The bus ride home is quiet. When they're in their room, they're quiet. The evening prayer is quiet. Everything is quiet. It feels like the beginning of the end of the world. In the evening, when Dream is staring out into the courtyard, George finally breaks.

"Dream."

Dream turns to look at him expectantly, and George wishes he was mad, wishes he'd scream and shout and shake George by the shoulders until his head snapped clean off his neck.

"George," Dream doesn't say his name softly, doesn't say it with reverence or hatred or anything.

He says George's name, and it feels like the beginning of the end. A sinkhole of hot acid begins to form in George's belly, and he's lightheaded when they lock eyes so he looks anywhere but there, anywhere but Dream.

"You said that we could talk about it," his voice comes out hoarse, and he wants Dream to feel sympathetic, wants him to reach out and coddle him, pretend that nothing's gone wrong and everything's alright.

Nothing is alright. The roof is crumbling down, and the drywall is peeling, and there's a thousand pairs of eyes behind them, waiting to cast a spotlight of misery and wretched guilt onto him.

“Yes,” Dream offers nothing more.

“I’m still going to the seminary,” George breathes out, and he almost wants Dream to stop him.

Dream shrugs. “Okay.”

George feels like his rib cage has been severed in half straight down his spine. “Okay?”

“I can tell you not to go, but what’s the point if you’re not going to listen to me?” Dream asks, tilting his head as he crosses his arms over his chest.

“So what do you suggest I do instead?” George’s arms go to cover his stomach as his shoulders hunch in.

Dream shrugs. “I don’t know. You would be unhappy there.”

“The same way you’re unhappy here?” George asks, and something flashes across Dream’s face so quickly he almost misses it. “Why don’t you leave Jericho, Dream?”

It’s Dream’s turn to return into himself, shoulders caving forward as his chin lowers his gaze towards the floor.

“That’s different.”

“How different?” George presses now that he’s found a way to even the playing field.

“You don’t understand,” Dream says behind gritted teeth. “You don’t get it.”

“You haven’t even asked me why I’m going to the seminary,” George manages to get out.

“Why are you going to the seminary, George?” Dream asks with his eyes closed like he’s sick of looking at him.

“You wouldn’t understand,” George echoes, and they’ve arrived at a stalemate.

Matchstick meets fuse. Something crackles in the air around them. They should talk about this, George reminds himself. They don’t need to fight. Dream moves closer to him, and George narrows his eyes as he looks up at him, waits for the venom he’s bound to spit.

“I don’t want to lose you,” Dream says quietly instead.

It’s a first step towards a truce, an olive branch. They don’t have to do this at each other’s necks, not after they’ve both tossed out every other option of survival. George sure as hell can’t go back to David and Thomas. Dream has nobody but him. He has nobody but Dream.

The light makes the skin of Dream’s forehead appear smooth, almost airbrushed. He’s got the softest widow’s peak, George notices, and he almost extends his hand to touch, before he remembers that he’s not sure if he’s allowed.

George isn’t sure what Dream is asking of him. George isn’t sure if he can give what he’s asking of him to him.

“You’re not losing me,” George says quietly, and he feels like there is something evil residing inside the marrow of his bones, poison in his bloodstream as he steps backwards, sits down on the bed and looks up at Dream with wide eyes.

Dream steps forward.

“Tell me why you can’t leave Jericho,” George blurts out as he leans backwards.

He watches as the muscle above Dream’s lip twitches for a moment.

“Tell me why you want to go to the seminary.”

Neither of them speak, and then Dream’s palms come down on either side of George, caging him in. Dream presses his forehead to George’s shoulder, pressing him down into the sheets before he dips to hover his teeth over just below his ear. Dream’s lips brush against the outline of his jaw before they’re mouth to mouth again like it’s a rehearsed habit. For a moment, George doesn’t dare touch, but then Dream presses his weight into him, and George’s hands find themselves gripping into the fabric of his sweater, slow, lazy movement.

“Dream,” George whispers. “What are you trying to do?”

Dream shrugs, before he dips down to kiss George again. “I dunno.”

It’s more urgent this time, teeth coming out to bite at his bottom lip before the familiar fluidity returns.

They lie there for a moment.

George’s mind wanders, briefly, to the way his father didn’t like it when he doodled in the margins of his maths homework. His father didn’t like many things. George remembers many of his criticisms, none of the praise. His fingers move to clutch at the biceps of Dream’s arms, before he lazily traces the outline of a leaf alongside the groove of muscle.

“I can’t stay away from you like this,” Dream confesses. “But I won’t be leaving with you in two months.”

“So don’t stay away from me,” George says as he pushes himself onto his elbows, trying to close the distance between the two of them again.

“Then what are we doing?” Dream asks, and George doesn’t have an answer for him.

“I don’t know.”

Dream thinks about this for a moment. “Can we still do this, then?”

“What’s this?” George asks, frowning as impatience bubbles up inside of his chest.

“This,” Dream motions between the two of them. “Because— well, I don’t know. Seems like a bit of a waste, to throw this away.”

Throw this away?

“I mean that at the seminary, you’re probably— I don’t know. You’re not going to have this there. And once you’re gone, the chances of them rooming me with someone else like this is— it’s not likely.”

“Do they know?” George asks against his better judgement. “Sister Catherine, and them? About you?”

Dream shakes his head no. “I’m not here because of that. Well, I am, but I’m not here for anything in particular, just registered as *generally troubled*. ”

George grins at that and Dream smiles back down at him, and for a moment he feels like everything just may turn out alright.

“I don’t think either of us will have an opportunity like this anytime soon,” Dream says, expression turning more serious. “So I don’t see a point in stopping.”

For a moment, George is confused. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that forget what I said on the ski lift,” Dream tells him, one of his hands coming up to rest over George’s hipbone, thumb pressing into the dip gently. “We should just keep doing this. It’s not like it was going to mean anything?”

George feels his heart stop beating in his chest for a moment as Dream looks down at him expectantly, like this is something he should have already contemplated. And sure, George knew, maybe, deep down, that just because they kissed more than once and exchanged more than a couple sentences between each other, that they’re not in love, or anything. George hasn’t even ever been in love, so he has no margin of comparison, but he didn’t think, at least, that what he felt for Dream was love. Still, to hear Dream reject the notion of that ever being a possibility so bluntly stung.

Because on one hand, he’d liked the fact that he hadn’t just felt like a mouth and a fist, liked feeling like someone was taking the time and attention to be familiar with him. But that didn’t mean— George isn’t sure what it means. All he knows is that the world outside is cold and horrible and wants to tear him apart with its teeth, and Dream is inside this room, and he’s familiar, and vulnerable, and George thinks he understands him enough.

Still... Still. Something.

“Well, yeah,” is all he manages to get out. “But— so what is this? What are you saying?”

Dream looks frustrated, like this isn’t how he had planned the conversation going in his head.

“Nothing. Just— pretend this never happened. Nothing happened. We never fought. And we’re not talking about the seminary again. Everything is back to normal.”

“Dream, if the seminary upsets you, you can talk to me about it,” George says slowly, and Dream scoffs.

“What’s there to be upset about? Are you going to change your mind?”

George swallows hard, shakes his head no.

“Then nothing,” Dream says. “Nothing’s changed. And you’re the one who didn’t want to talk about it.”

“But that was before,” George tries to reason.

“Before what?”

“Dream,” George says in disbelief. “Before we got involved.”

“How is it any different?” Dream snaps. “Nothing’s changed. You were going to the seminary then, and you’re still going now. I’m still staying here.”

George puts a hand on his shoulder. “Are you upset?”

“No,” Dream says, refusing to look him in the eye.

For a brief moment, George entertains the possibility of Dream somehow falling for him, hands wrapped around his waist as the two of them wake up in the morning, baptised in daylight. He feels guilty the moment he imagines it, tries to scrub his mind clean of the visual. It seems invasive, almost, to imagine the two of them in such an intimate setting, especially right after Dream had so explicitly stated that it was out of the question. Impossible. And George knows this. To be honest, he hadn’t even thought about it until right now.

He’s not sure how he feels about it. He tucks it away.

“Then we’re good?” George asks quietly, and even though he hadn’t wanted this conversation to take place at all, he feels like there is so much left to say.

“Yeah,” Dream says, finally appearing a little less tense than he did at the beginning of the conversation. “Sorry. I mean, assuming you still want to.”

George handles guilt poorly, lets it marinate and fester and eat away at him until he dissolves. George knows that with every day he lets himself touch and feel and kiss, he’s going to feel worse about it, but he’s only human when Dream is hovering over him, dark eyes flickering to his mouth as the spit shines on his bottom lip, some foreign hunger settling into his bones.

He should tell Dream that there’s nothing to be sorry for. Instead, he’s saying, “I’m sorry too,” and he doesn’t know why, and it feels like they’re teetering on the edge of something disastrous when they kiss again, but the rush makes George dizzy-drunk with endorphins, and he’s only human, he reminds himself when they find themselves falling back together every time they pull apart, like clockwork.

Dream reads before bed, but he doesn’t invite George. He’s got a book he’s taken from God knows where. George doesn’t sit as close as he used to, afraid to blur some invisible line, leading the two of them into dangerous territory. He knows that Dream isn’t very experienced to begin with, and he’s afraid that he’ll somehow find a way to mess this up for the both of them. He’s afraid of ruining this for the both of them. When he leaves here, he at the very least wants to write to Dream, keep in contact. He isn’t sure if he’d be allowed to speak as freely in the letters as he is out loud, obviously, but he can’t think of severing the connection between the two of them.

He wants to crawl into bed with him. His own sheets feel like sandpaper against his skin.

He doesn’t. Sleep takes him violently.

He dreams of white doves sitting on the branches of an apricot tree, being stood knee deep in a sea of tar. The doves watch him sink into the asphalt like it’s quicksand, before diving headfirst into the ground below him. They emerge as crows, black beady eyes and thick beaks, before hissing and digging their clawed feet into the flesh of his arms, but it doesn’t hurt. He struggles against the ground as it pulls him deeper, before the dark viscous matter disappears all at once, revealing a bird’s wing caught underneath the heel of his shoe.

It’s still dark when his eyes shoot open, heart beating loudly in his chest as the blood thrums in his ears. Dream is still sitting in the same spot, reading. He studies George for a moment, and when they lock eyes, George feels pathetic. He doesn’t want to feel Dream’s eyes leave him, doesn’t

want to trade the tenderness in for physical touch, but he doesn't know if he can give up the way Dream's hands feel on him now that he's experienced it.

"You okay?" Dream finally asks, and George looks away from him.

"Yeah. Just a bad dream."

"Oh."

The silence is heavy.

"Can I come sit with you?"

When Dream doesn't answer immediately, he starts to panic.

"I don't mean— I just need someone next to me, but it's not urgent. I don't mean need, but I—"

"You can come sit," Dream says, and he's calm and level-toned as he does, and for some reason it tears George apart that this isn't tearing Dream apart.

At least not in the same way it's tearing George apart. When he sits next to him, still keeping a hair's distance so that they don't touch, don't need to touch outside from when they're being deliberate with how they're touching, George notices how Dream's eyelids have somehow been swallowed up by the upper part of his brows, like his eyes have sunken into his face.

Dream flips the page. His hands don't tremble. George almost wants them to, and he chides himself for it. He doesn't want Dream to feel bad about this. He doesn't.

He holds out his own hands in front of him, uneven nails and red nail beds, trembling.

"What are you doing?" Dream sounds amused as he shifts closer, and the back of his foot grazes the side of George's ribs, and George violently jerks up at the contact.

"We can still touch, y'know, when we're not..." Dream trails off, and George closes his eyes, tells himself it's exhaustion and not avoidance.

"Can I tell you something?" George asks against his better judgement.

Dream is quiet for one beat, a second one. "Sure."

"Y'know how I told you I always feel like someone's watching me, and that I feel like the roof might break at any second, and you said it's probably just because I hate this place?"

Dream thinks for a moment. "Sure."

"When we were on the ski lift," George starts, unsure of why his mouth is spilling the most intimate of his thoughts out into the open. "I kept thinking about falling off."

"Yeah," Dream breathes out. "I was there."

"But I mean, what if I did? Fall off? Onto the ground?"

"George," Dream warns. "You didn't."

"Yeah," George continues. "But I just think that if I did, things would be different."

“Obviously, you idiot,” Dream scoffs, and he almost sounds fond. “If you fell thirty feet down you’d be at the hospital.”

“I kind of wish I did,” George starts. “Sometimes I wish something really bad would happen to me.”

“George,” Dream whispers, and it almost holds a candle to the way he had said it just days ago, when the two of them had elected to ignore the crushing reality outside of the walls of their bedroom.

It took them one day to crumble outside.

“What?” George whispers back. “I don’t mean like— I don’t want to die. I think. Not yet. But I wish something really horrible would happen to me, so I’d have an excuse to do something different.”

His mind wanders back to the way the granite felt embedded into his chin, the way losing blood had reminded him of being hungry. Still, he feels like it wasn’t enough.

“You don’t need to fall off a ski lift to do something different,” Dream finally settles on saying.

George shrugs. “I don’t know. Something horrible needs to happen, between now and the seminary, and maybe it’ll make me not want to go.”

Dream thinks about this for a moment. “Isn’t the promise of a future you’ll be unhappy in not enough for you?”

George almost laughs out loud at that. “It’s complicated.”

“Explain it to me then,” Dream says, and George feels the bed dip as Dream puts his book on the nightstand.

George’s Bible is on his nightstand. George’s father’s Bible. He hasn’t read it in ages, not since he’d learned he didn’t need to pretend around Dream, at least in regards to that.

“I feel like there isn’t really a future for me, where I get to be happy,” George admits, and hearing the resignation in his tone out loud makes him feel worse about it. “I don’t know.”

“There has to be something that makes you happy,” Dream insists. “You can do it instead of the seminary.”

“It doesn’t matter what makes me happy,” George states. “I have to go to the seminary.”

Dream doesn’t respond. George bets he’s tired of talking in circles. George is tired too. He can still hear the crunch of the hollow wing bone underneath his boots. Not real, he tries to remind himself. The feeling of phantom talons in the meat of his thighs keeps him tethered to consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

hey thank you for reading hope you're all well, hope you all enjoyed the chapter :)
feel free to let me know what you think in the comments, see you in the next one <3

sky fissures

Chapter Summary

I am afraid to stay here alone, I have nothing except my body— it glistens in the dark, a star with crossed hands, so that I am scared to look at myself. Earth, do not abandon me.

- Czesław Miłosz, The Song

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

This is where George is meant to make sense of things and compartmentalise. What he feels for Dream. What he's doing with Dream. What he's doing *to* Dream. What he's doing to himself.

Absolution will come with George's own revelation. When faith strikes him. He vacillates between hope and despair, with what his heart wants and what his brain knows he needs. Everything is convoluted and messy and blurred, except for the future. In two months time, he will leave here, and Dream will become a distant memory. It's best not to get too attached. Dream had established that. George had agreed with him.

Sometimes, he can't help himself. Sometimes, he indulges past what is unspokenly allowed.

Past when Dream touches him, past when he touches Dream. This is what George has decided to settle for; stolen time and cold hands pressed to the hot skin of his waist, quick, fast, messy. George should be grateful, that he's with Dream and not someone else. Dream has rough hands, but he doesn't touch to bruise, and he doesn't really know what he's doing but he's making an effort to try, and maybe there's something sick inside George that enjoys being the only one that gets to see him all timid and unsure, being the only one that gets to peel back the layers and interact with the most vulnerable part of him.

He sees something crawl up the side of the wall out of the corner of his eye.

George thinks that a month ago, this would have been enough. Borrowed moments of time and a glance over the shoulder after they finish, hands helping him to the sink to clean up when his legs feel too weak to make the journey. Indulgence without the strings attached.

But now he knows Dream, knows the desperation in his heart to be loved, recognizes a version of himself, but braver, inside of him, and it's not enough. George comes to the difficult conclusion that no amount of pretending is going to fix the hole in his chest, and he's just going to have to learn to live with that.

But occasionally, he still indulges, thinking about what everything would feel like to look forward to the life he had ahead of him. He's got fifty years, at least, sixty if he's unlucky. Fifty long years of dragging his feet through the mud, unloved, nothing but the emptiness of the chapel to seek solace in.

The door creaks.

He's just tired, and sick, and waiting for disaster to strike him, to turn his life into wreckage. He exhales harshly. Nobody is going to come to save him. He's miserable, and angry, and if he's being honest he misses when Dream had choice words for him, when there was enough substance to George that someone could pick apart where all of the weak spots were. Now, George is just nothing. Not enough of him to bother salvaging, not enough of him to save, not enough of him to make something out of.

If he presses his palms over his ears and closes his eyes tight while he inhales, he can hear thunder in the background of nothingness. It beats the silence. He can almost feel his lungs give out in a sorry attempt to escape the poison he's been steeping himself in. He kicks his feet in the air in an attempt to get comfortable.

"What are you doing?" Dream asks when he sees him, the corners of his mouth quirked up in a smile.

George sees him and feels the room spin. Dream is everything he's not brave enough to take.

His blood works itself up to a simmer, pseudo-fever. "Nothing."

Dream sits next to him, and George tries his best to mellow out. It's fine, everything is fine. The world is ending, and he's going to die, and he's never going to get to fall in love.

"Tomorrow's New Years," Dream says softly. "They're doing a little party downstairs for everyone who wants to stay up."

Dream, once he gets out of here, is going to fall in love. He deserves it, George thinks. He can see him, furrowed brows and clenched jaw. Maybe the next person they put in this room will be a version of George who is brave enough to say what he wants, persuasive enough to get Dream to leave here. He thinks about it sometimes, when he's indulging in his own private domestic fantasies. It makes him want to put his head through the drywall. George grits his teeth and turns his head.

George scoffs. "I don't want to stay up."

"C'mon," Dream rolls his eyes, unbuttons the top of his collar. "Don't you have *appearances* to keep up?"

He's done thinking. Dream is looking at him, smiling down gently at him like he deserves it, like he's not someone determined to push his burden onto everyone else, only to end up unsatisfied, and maybe George had made peace with the idea of being a sinner, but he hasn't quite wrapped his head around being a bad person. He doesn't want to be a bad person, but the apathy has already begun to wrap its hand around his neck, and George would rather give in than wrestle with fate any longer.

Dream, and the life that has been given to him. Dream, the collateral of when George finally burns himself to the fucking ground.

Still, he's selfish, tracing back the pathway of his hands from the night before with eyes, across Dream's chest, up the column of his neck, cheekbones, eyes.

"George," Dream repeats, shifting closer.

Static cracks in the air around them. Dream's hand, cold against his cheek.

"Don't care," George mumbles, closing his eyes as he props the heels of his feet against the wall.

“Are there any spiders here?”

“I haven’t seen any,” Dream yawns as he lies down next to him, copying George’s position.

They lie there in silence. George pretends that they’ve met under different circumstances.

“I don’t want to go downstairs,” George states, covering his eyes with his palms.

A beat in silence. George can feel the marrow in his bones squeeze in agony. This life is all there is, and he’s rotting.

“Okay,” Dream finally says, shifting closer. “Then I’m not going either.”

Dream is sweet, and takes the edge off the worst thoughts, but he’s not a miracle worker, to George’s dismay. The worst of him still festers inside of his chest, and Dream’s courage unfortunately can’t be transmitted to him through osmosis. No matter how long the two of them sit in this room with the door locked, no matter how much time they spend pressed so close together George sometimes thinks they’ll both just melt into each other.

He doesn’t tell Dream this. It’s not like it matters. He’s leaving in two months, and there’s no point in pretending that the two of them will ever see each other again after their time runs out.

“Okay,” George echoes.

George wants.

They sit together during dinner, and Sister Catherine is surprised when the two of them declare that they’re not going to sit with everyone else to count down the seconds until the clock hits midnight, but she doesn’t prod. She shoots George a sympathetic glance. George doesn’t even know what for, but he offers a half smile in return before climbing up the stairs, laying back down in bed.

“George,” Dream says, stepping towards him. “What’s wrong?”

George shrugs. He had expected the end of the world to come all at once, always pictured the day of judgement as violent; cracks in the atmosphere and chasms beneath his feet, collapse and suffocation and agony. The end of the world comes quietly. It’s a slow death. His limbs give way before his eyes are even sure they’ve seen the ceiling crack. Except the world isn’t ending, and life outside of these four walls is good and worth living. Someone had a baby today. Someone got married, and somebody else is sitting in their living room with the love of their life, and somebody else is grieving their child, and George is going to die alone in the arms of a phantom God.

He looks up at Dream and blinks slowly, before reaching out to take the hem of his shirt between his fingers.

George wants.

“Hey,” Dream says as George pulls him closer, the space between his brows creasing. “What’s up?”

George shakes his head no. “Just tired. Come here.”

He’s on fire, and Dream’s mouth is kerosene. He shivers as Dream’s hand reaches underneath his sweater, cold palm pressed flat against his stomach.

“You okay?” Dream whispers, and George wishes he wouldn’t.

He kisses him again, hooks a leg around Dream's back to pull him closer, digs his fingernails into the skin of Dream's back. He closes his eyes as Dream rolls his hips, tentatively, and then firmer, imagines that there's someone who loves him in Dream's place. He feels dirty when he opens his eyes after they finish, doesn't fall asleep until the light begins to filter in through the window.

When he goes downstairs to see tinsel wrapped around the support beams it takes him a moment to remember why it's even there. He goes back to bed after breakfast. Dream sits at his desk and works away at something, and George tries not to let the way the graphite screeches against the page get on his nerves.

The guilt returns with newfound fury, but it takes different victims. This time, it's Dream he's wronging. Dream and his courage walk hand in hand with his anger. Dream and his bravery, paired with his recklessness. Dream and his strength, positioned against Dream and his stubbornness. George wants to take him in the palm of his hands and hold him close just as much as he feels like he should set this whole affair on fire and pretend it never happened.

He turns his head towards Dream's desk, neat and tidy aside from the stack of blank papers placed in the corner. The bed creaks, and he sees Dream with his knee on the corner of the mattress, smiling at him again.

"What're you doing?"

George shrugs, stares up at the ceiling, knows he's being difficult.

"It's not good for you to always be in here," Dream's voice calls as it moves towards the windows.

George opens his eyes to light flooding into the room, the sound of a bird calling faintly in the distance.

"I'm serious," Dream continues, and George closes his eyes. "You're gonna get sick. Just lying here."

"I'm tired," George mutters, and that's the only explanation he has for anything.

He keeps his eyes closed, wondering how many times he's going to do this, how many people he's going to sink his claws into and defile. Dream is making his bed. George hasn't moved from underneath the duvet aside from going to sit in all of his mandatory sessions, before making his way back upstairs and underneath the covers.

Dream's palm pressed to his forehead.

George wonders how many people he's going to fall in love with in his lifetime. Regular church goers, men with wives. The feeling in his stomach twists and contorts itself into something horrifying, and George comes to terms with, for the first time in his life, that this might not be something he's able to keep down forever.

"George," Dream's voice, an anchor to this bedroom, all he has left. "C'mon. Let's go outside."

He's dragged out of bed and forced into a jacket and gloves. When they pass by a table of people sitting down in the dining room on the way out, they turn their heads to look at them. Dream doesn't seem to mind, lacing up his boots like everything is normal, but George can feel the way

their eyes linger on their backs, and it makes him feel uneasy.

Dream looks at him expectantly when they make their way out of the doorway, onto the tarmac. His boots are loud against the pavement. He kicks a stone into a puddle.

“What’s up?” Dream asks again standing closer to him, and their arms brush against each other.

George jumps back like he’s been shocked, blinks slowly at the ground. “Sorry.”

Dream tries to talk to him again, but George’s mouth feels dry, and heavy, and he tells Dream he doesn’t really feel like talking. The cold air bites at the apples of his cheeks, and he winces at the sting. They make their way back early, and George goes right back under the covers as soon as they arrive back in the attic. He skips dinner to stare at the ceiling.

“You’re worrying me,” Dream says out loud after the sun goes down and the room goes dim.

“George? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” George repeats, eyes still closed. “Just tired. You can come sit with me if you want.”

Dream sits down next to him, on the side of the mattress, and George wonders if this is what being on your deathbed feels like, with all he has staring down at him with concern in his eyes.

“George,” Dream says his name again, slow this time. “I’m scared. You’re like— you started— if you don’t want to—”

George manages to bring his hand up to Dream’s mouth, offering a half smile. “I’m fine. It’s not you.”

It’s not Dream. It’s everything in the world but Dream. Everything outside and downstairs, everything he had thought he knew crumbling in his fists, slipping through the gaps of his fingers. His hands tremble when he grabs onto Dream’s collar and pulls him close. He breathes in sharply when they’re chest to chest, tries to inhale hard enough to pop his lungs. Dream touches him softly today, like he’s delicate, and it’s so fucking intoxicating that George feels like he might spill his guts onto the hardwood floor if this keeps on any longer. Dream drags the tips of his fingers along his ribcage, collarbones, the border of his jaw. He kisses him sweetly and George wonders what could be so wrong about this, aches when Dream grins against his mouth.

“What did you first think when you met me?” George asks again, ear pressed against his chest.

He knows what the answer will be, but he needs to hear it.

“It doesn’t matter,” Dream says instead, chin pressed into the top of his head. “I like you now.”

Say you thought I was different. Say you thought you could save me.

“I forget,” George tries, but Dream laughs, doesn’t say it.

Say I can be different. Say you want me to be different.

He doesn’t.

George wants to grab him by the shoulders and shake him, ask him how he’s so fine with being here any longer than he has to be, ask him how he can look at George and play nice with him after he’s going to leave him behind. And maybe, he wants Dream to take George’s head in his hands and shake him until he gives an answer as to why he’s going to the seminary. Maybe, George

doesn't want apathy. Maybe George wants to be worth saving.

Doesn't matter. They wake up together, and Dream untangles himself from George hastily, slips into the shower while George lays there in his metaphorical sickbed, wallowing in desperate hunger.

Dream comes with them to town the next weekend, hands in his pockets as he walks down the aisles of the drug store while George wonders if he'll be scolded for buying bubblegum. He gets it anyways, slips it into his jacket pocket and tells Sister Catherine he didn't end up buying anything. When they get back to their room, he takes a long shower with the water hot enough to burn, scratching at the skin of his back, picking the dead skin from underneath his fingertips.

Dream is sitting on the floor when he comes back into their bedroom, by the loose floorboard, and looks up at George and jumps, before looking at him with wide eyes.

"Hey," he says softly before he gets to his feet, moves to his side of the room.

"Hi," George says, uncertain of what exactly that means. "Did you— were you doing something?"

"No," Dream says it too quickly, the way he did when he didn't trust George in the slightest, and George pretends it doesn't cut through him.

"Okay," George says before he reaches into the closet, slips into his pyjamas.

He hears Dream shifting around on the bed. When he steps forward to see him with a pen in hand and a notebook, he leaves him alone. George wishes he'd bought something to keep him busy.

Someone knocks at the door. George goes to get it, swings the door open. Sister Catherine is standing there, looking panicked, hand fiddling with the cross on her necklace.

"We need you both in the chapel in less than half an hour," she breathes out, before going sprinting down the stairs.

Dream peeks his head out to look at him. George feels the terror set in slow.

"Do you think—?" he whispers, and Dream cocks his head in confusion.

"What?"

"Why would they call us down to the chapel?" he whispers furiously as he closes the door. "Fuck, what if—"

"I'm sure it's nothing," Dream dismisses. "They do this sometimes, if like— someone in the community is having a problem. They call everyone down and we pray for them."

It doesn't help calm him down in the slightest. He slips on a pair of shoes and the two of them make their way down. Every step feels closer to imminent destruction, when it all comes out from under the rug and brings the end of the world.

They learn that one of the caretakers has fallen sick.

George swallows down the lump in his throat as everyone sits in prayer, keeps his gaze towards the floor, tries not to look so guilty. Dream walks ahead of him up the stairs. When they reach their room he looks at him concernedly.

Maybe George is a little disappointed. Maybe George wants to be found and yelled at and kicked to the streets, freed from the shackles of responsibility and honour.

“It’s over,” he reminds him. “I told you. They wouldn’t find out.”

“I know,” George states, tossing his jacket towards his chair. “It’s— good.”

Dream walks towards him again, places a hand on each of his shoulders, presses down. George looks up at him and something in Dream’s expression shifts. Maybe he can tell what George is thinking, connecting dots and figuring out just how twisted he is.

“Breathe, George,” Dream says instead, and then he withdraws his hands and walks towards his own bed.

Disappointment buds in his chest. He doesn’t quite understand why.

Chapter End Notes

gifted this fic 2 darcy urplace thanks for listening 2 me bitch about this for ages and ages . and also for being an absolute fucking psycho like seriously what the fuck is wrong with you. ily.

Sorry for the delay In updating I was writing 10k words of omegaverse. Hopefully back 2 semi regular updating soon idk.

hope u all enjoyed comments kudos etc appreciated see u in the next one

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sand glass

Chapter Summary

In these dreams it's always you:
the boy in the sweatshirt,
the boy on the bridge, the boy who always keeps me
from jumping off the bridge.
Oh, the things we invent when we are scared
and want to be rescued.

- Richard Siken, Crush

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

One of the priests pulls George out of his scheduled sessions on a Tuesday, takes him down to town. It rains the whole way through. The priest warns George about the nature of priesthood, how abstinence from selfishness changes the way you see the world, see people.

“Everyone becomes worse, because you must become better,” he says, crossing his arms over his chest. “And you must find it within yourself to love those worse than you still.”

A laundry list of things he can't indulge in. Servitude becoming his purpose, despite the enhanced spiritual awareness. George thinks it sounds a little stuck up, if he's being honest, but he bites his tongue.

He's sure it's much easier said than done, to not want for anything, to put faith in something bigger than himself, to give himself over completely to the will of fate.

These days, more than anything, George wants.

At first, it's accompanied by guilt and the fear of falling into greed. He eases himself into it. Initially, it's something he only dares to indulge in when he's alone, when he has a way to chalk it up as a moment of weakness. Then, he catches himself wanting more often. When he's looking out the windows into the rolling distance. When he sees people in the streets, laughing, blissfully unaware of what the world may take from them in the following moments. When he's pressed into Dream's side in the evenings.

The world has been shrouded in fog and uncertainty before. George's mother describes God as the beam of light slicing through the ambivalence of the material world. George has spent his whole life wandering blindly through the void in an attempt to seek out where that light could be, to discover that his eyes had been closed the whole time.

Children chasing each other through the spaces between the pews. The man at the cash register cracks a smile at a woman who walks through the door. The pit in his stomach grows only deeper when he realises how much of life he hasn't even given himself an opportunity to see before he signed himself away to something he didn't even want.

The priest leaves him at a bookstore, where he waits out the storm until the next bus arrives. He wanders the narrow aisles, picks three out that he thinks maybe Dream would like. His hands shake as he places them on the counter. When he's four cents short the man waves his hand and tells him not to worry. He tucks all of them into his coat, runs to the bus, determined not to let the rain damage the pages.

He's conflicted at how he feels when the day ends. When he opens the door to their bedroom, Dream is sitting on the floor, hands pressed flat against the hardwood.

"What are you doing?" George asks as he shuts the door, locks it.

Dream looks up at him. "Where were you today?"

George shrugs off his coat, shakes his head in an attempt to get the excess rainwater out of his hair. "Some priest took me out to town to talk to me about my— about my career aspirations, and stuff."

Dream nods, looks to the floor for a moment before looking back up at him again. George tosses the books to his bed.

"How was your day?" George undresses quickly, pulls a sweater from home over his head before going over to sit at the chair of Dream's desk.

Dream shrugs. "Alright."

He opens his mouth, as if he wants to add something, but then he shakes his head no, deciding against it. George watches him with a veiled sadness. He wonders, for a moment longer than he usually does, what the world would look like to him if he and Dream met under different circumstances, in different times and a different place. George wonders if Dream would be able to stand him if he knew him in his hometown, naive and hypocritical but full of some aimless hope that maybe one day something other than this would be out there for him.

He faces Dream. "What were you doing?"

"You look different," Dream blurts out. "You look— I dunno."

George could laugh at the absurdity of it. He feels out of his mind afraid at the way time slips out between his fingers, at the mapping of what the rest of his life will look like. It's worse than the numb acceptance, because there is something inside of him that is maybe looking to go to bat with fate, willing to fight for his seat at the table of what the rest of his life will look like.

"Are you happy with it?" Dream speaks again, scratching at his cuticles. "With what everything is going to be like?"

"Hm?"

"As like— when you go to the seminary? Are you happy with the way everything's going to look?"

The weight of the world drops itself on his chest all at once, and it takes everything in him to not stumble back, reeling, as if the words had punched him in the chest. Everyone else and their happiness, passing figures in George's life as he's condemned to spend it lying. Theoretical eternal bliss, or all that he's certain of that really exists. George has taken a raincheck on happy. George will have eternity to be happy, that's what he's been telling himself.

But he's not. He doesn't know if this will ever lead to anything.

He looks down at his hands, watches the vein that leads to his middle finger twitch, all he has tethering him to here. Flesh and blood and bone.

“I’m— I don’t think I am,” George confesses. “I’m not happy.”

The silence stretches for miles.

“I don’t think I’m going to be happy like this,” he continues, spitting the words out like they’re bitter on his tongue. “But I— I don’t know what to do.”

This is where Dream is meant to spark some sort of inspiration within him to change, to put this doubt and fear into action, to do something, *anything* but be complacent. George tries to think of what that would look like. He doesn’t know.

“I’m sure you’ll figure it out,” is what Dream mumbles out instead.

Disappointment sits heavy in his chest. Dream cannot undo how the world around them works, he learns. He misses when he would at least try to delude him into thinking he could. George wonders if he’s done something evil to Dream by wanting him. When they had first met, Dream had seemed infallible, and now he’s tired and passive.

He pushes the thoughts away.

George sits down on the floor next to him, loops his fingers over Dream’s wrists. “Yeah.”

“You’re leaving so soon,” Dream reminds him.

Anxiety sits in the pit of George’s stomach. “Yeah.”

A beat. “I’ll miss you.”

“We have time,” George reminds him as Dream presses his palms to George’s cheeks and closes his eyes, thumbs resting on the bridge of George’s nose.

“We don’t,” Dream whispers before he opens them.

George shifts closer to him, sits by his side for a moment, tries to imagine the two of them anywhere but here, but he can’t and he hates it. All he has of Dream will be here, a dimly lit room in the attic,

“Do you plan on leaving anytime soon?” George asks, closing his eyes. “After me?”

“No,” Dream shakes his head as he says it. “I’m— I’m here.”

George pictures the distance between the two of them, cut communication lines and nothing but memory to cement the fact they were here. They were here together. It should count for something but it doesn’t.

“You should come find me, when you get out,” George tells him, hand delicately placing itself on Dream’s knee.

Dream laughs, entertains his thought. “Where will you be?”

George doesn’t know. He stays quiet.

“I’d like to,” Dream adds after a moment. “Come see you after this. I think I’d like to. If I saw you

just walking down the street, years down the line, I'd say hello."

Years down the line. God. This is just a fraction of a moment. His time here. Maybe George will miss it. If the seminary is anything like he's heard, he's certain he will. George feels like the world is collapsing in on itself around him. Dream can't stop the end of times, but he serves as an ailment of some sort. A tether to reality, to who he wants to be. If George had ever been who he wanted to be, it happened here. Watched by Dream's eyes.

George turns to him. "Just hello?" *Nothing more?*

Dream thinks for a moment, then nods. "Just hello."

George's hand goes to fiddle with the chain of his necklaces, traces down the ridges, twists the cross between his index finger and thumb.

"I would say more than just *hello* to you," George mumbles. "If I ran into you afterwards."

"Yeah?" Dream turns to face him, hands pressing down on the ground around George, caging him in. "What would you say?"

It's the same. It hurts the same. Tell me it doesn't hurt the same for you. Tell me it gets better. Tell me I can get better. I don't know what better is.

George thinks for a moment. "I'd ask how you were, at least."

Dream rolls his eyes as he grins, leans forward to kiss George's chin. He shifts closer, kisses the corner of his mouth once, then again. George's hands wrap around his shoulder and they're pulled close together again.

Kiss me properly, he'd say if he was brave. *Kiss me like I'm never going to die, kiss me like you know I'll be here forever.*

George wants. To be kissed like they have until the stars blink out, to be kissed patiently with the intention of being known, without the intention to etch the feeling into flesh, but to be carved a space for in the cavity in his chest, loved and cherished and kept without the intention of being let go. He wants Dream to kiss him like it's a lazy Sunday morning, surface level, without the trepidation that what is left in the top half of the hour glass will be taken from them without morning. *Kiss me like nothing is sacred. Kiss me like I'll be with you forever.*

"I would," George repeats as Dream kisses him again.

Not like this, he's thinking with foolish desperation.

"I believe you," Dream rolls his eyes and smiles again, and George takes both his hands and presses them to his cheeks, presses his thumbs in the dips below his eyes, looks at his desperately for something, anything.

"Maybe you'll be honest with me then," the words are out of his mouth before he even knows what he's saying. "Stop telling me you're fine with all this, the way things are unfolding for you."

The room is silent. Dream's grip on him softens.

"What do you mean?" Dream asks, leaning his head back so it rests against the side of the bed.

George exhales. "Don't you want more than this?"

Dream blinks at him slowly. "More than what?"

"More than here," George catches the urgency in his tone but he can't do anything to stop it.

"More than— don't you want to leave here?"

Dream shrugs. "Not— I mean, if I had the— I don't know. I don't really care at the moment, if I'm being honest with you."

Dream's fingers dig into the sides of his stomach as he pulls him in and kisses him, this time on the mouth. George pulls away.

"I don't— I don't understand," George tells him, frowning. "Why don't you—"

"George," the urgency in Dream's voice makes him go quiet. "Let's not talk about this. I haven't said anything about the seminary."

"We aren't talking about me," George presses. "What about you? What are you going to do once I'm gone? Just, back to before? Like it never happened?"

"I hope you don't take this personally," Dream speaks to him slowly. "But nobody outside of this room cares what my relationship to you is. Once you leave, once everyone in this session leaves, with the exception of probably like, one or two people probably, nobody here will know who you are. Then they'll form their own opinions of me, and I doubt anything is going to drastically change."

"Do you, like," George hesitates. "Think anything has changed? About you? After?"

Dream frowns, confused. "After what?"

"After me."

Everything has changed, because of you, George wants to tell him. Everything has changed for me. I don't know who I am. I don't want to be this part of me anymore. I want to be more like you. I want to be important to you. I want to change you, the way you've changed me. I don't know what that means.

Dream shrugs. "I guess."

George presses his lips together, tries not to look as disappointed as he feels.

"It's not like I'm going to forget you," Dream continues, leaning in again to kiss him.

George closes his eyes as he does, before pulling away, hooking his finger into the chain around his neck. "Can you get the clasp for me?"

He turns his head to the side so that Dream can see the silver of the necklace against his skin. Dream's hands are cold as they brush against his collar. He leans on close to see better, exhales against George's shoulder.

"I can't get it," he mutters. "My fingers are too big."

George twists it around, struggles to get his nail hooked underneath the latch. Dream watches him struggle, until it finally unfastens, the cross hitting the ground with a clink. He picks it up, careful.

"You got it," Dream tells him from the floor as he moves to put it on his bedside table, next to the Bible he hasn't touched in days.

George shivers, even though he's not really that cold. This is the most he and Dream have spoken in a while about anything below surface level conversation. Something about it still leaves him feeling unsated, but he can't put his finger on what. Dream's eyes rake over him, hungry, and George wonders what Dream sees for himself, past here.

"Should we move to the bed?" George finally asks, watches as Dream gets to his feet and presses their mouths together, again.

He sits in the chapel more often now. In between Bible study and lunch, at the end of the day if he knows Dream won't be in their room. George scares himself a little when he's all alone, thoughts threatening to teeter towards dark territory. It ends with him fantasising about his own demise, staring at the ceiling.

Somehow, sitting here, neck deep in the life he dreads is better.

Dream has come with him today. They sit shoulder to shoulder.

One one hand, he's making a sort of peace with it. On the other, he's craning his neck as the noose tightens, searching for a way out. When he goes home, he'll finalise and send off the papers to whichever university his parents have picked out for him, most certainly close to home. He'll spend four years hiding some more.

His heart clenches inside of his chest. Something begs for him to stop being so complacent in his own demise. He *can't*.

He feels like he's been only half functioning for so long. Half wanting and half doing and half present as the days roll on. He isn't sure he has the strength to keep going, much less make a decision that will drastically alter the course of his life.

Isn't that what he's been waiting for? Something to drastically alter the course of his life?

He thinks about his mother. Her warm smile and her gentle words, every moment she had chosen to love him. He thinks of her and her tendency to worry about him. Maybe she's been right to worry about him all his life. George can't pinpoint the moment where her love morphed into the beast it was now. She loves him enough to want him to be fixed. Not enough to love him as he is. She loves him. She loves what he could have been.

George closes his eyes. She loves what he is not.

He thinks about his father, unconditional love. In comparison to his mother, his presence is quieter. George can't pinpoint the moment where his father grew resentful of the person he was becoming either. Perhaps they were always wary.

Maybe George wishes things were different between the three of them. If they'd maybe manage to hold back the anger long enough to hear him out.

He looks down at his palms, wondering if he's supposed to be the one that brings the disaster. He's not sure. He's sick of being unsure. He glanced at the spaces between the stained glass.

Give me anything, he tries. Still nothing.

He looks over at Dream, who is picking at his cuticles again. George notices that he's gotten paler, that the hollows of his cheekbones are even more prominent from this angle. He feels himself leaning in to press a kiss to the corner of his mouth before he even realises what he's doing. He squares his shoulders, sits facing the front, and wonders why it has to be like this.

Dream has grown tired of him, in the little time they've spent together. George has grown tired of himself, has shrank in his shell in an attempt to escape the life he's been damned to live. He cranes his neck to look behind them, and only when he's certain that no one is behind the door, he takes Dream's hand into his own, squeezes it in some desperate attempt for reciprocation of desperation, for some shred of hope.

Dream shifts closer to him, presses his forehead into the skin of George's neck for a moment, before pulling away hastily. George stares at the stained glass again, wonders what could be so wrong about this, what about it disqualifies him from the love of something meant to be all-loving.

Later, Dream sits with him on his bed, cheek pressed to his chest as he traces the line of George's collarbone with his finger, and something washes over him in an intensity that he's never felt in his life. He turns his head to the side, directs his gaze towards the ceiling as phantom spiders crawl across the walls in the corner of his vision. He looks down at Dream. Dream looks back up at him. Something new blossoms in his chest. It's big and intense and it *terrifies* him. He brushes his thumb across the bridge of Dream's nose, softly, watches as Dream closes his eyes, and George holds onto him tighter as the evening bleeds into night, hopes that they've reached the eye of the storm.

Chapter End Notes

hiii. hope u all liked it see u soon

aftershocks

Chapter Summary

Its claw-like hands reach out,
slashing honed razors,
each tick slicing deeply
into my tenuous sanity.
Teetering over the edge,
I topple into affectless isolation
and the refuge of memory.

- Rick Anderson, The Ghosts Are Laughing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The back of the kitchen doesn't have windows. It feels like night time, though it's barely noon. Time still doesn't do him any favours, and there are important decisions that he'll have to make sooner rather than later. He feels less stuck, more lost. Sister Catherine says he has a stack of forms he has to fill out to send back home to his parents by next week. They've been sitting on his desk, untouched.

The suds climb up to his elbows as he dunks the dishes in the soap water. George doesn't mind washing the dishes. In comparison to the other chores, it's really not the worst one. The problem is David stood two feet away from him, aggressively patting the plates dry before tossing them on the clean rack. George flinches every time he hears the china clink against itself, and he hopes that he's able to leave without anything starting up.

They haven't spoken in ages. George has successfully been able to avoid him. It isn't an impossible task, if he's being honest. Whenever he's not attending mandatory activities, he holes himself up in his room.

David speaks first. "Alright, George?"

Like nothing has even happened. Still, George would rather not deal with him when he's angry, or upset, so he swallows down his pride and decides to engage in small talk. It will only take fifteen more minutes to get through this, and then he can be on his way.

"Yeah," he mutters. "Hope you're alright too."

He hears David sigh. "I've been okay."

They work in silence for a few more beats.

"Wish I could say the same about Thomas," he mutters. "Keeps seeing floaters in his right eye. Might be permanent."

George exhales and resists the urge to roll his eyes, decides to grit his teeth and get through this so he can get back to maintaining his distance. "Okay."

“Dream’s a fucking maniac,” he continues, and George almost admires his commitment to trying to change his mind.

“It’s not a joke,” David says seriously. “Thomas could sue, y’know.”

There’s still a spot left on one of the spoons that hadn’t been scrubbed properly by the person ahead of him in the assembly line. He taps them on the shoulder, lets them know.

“Then again,” David continues. “Probably wouldn’t be a problem. His parents can afford to ship him off to here for ages, don’t think they’d so much as flinch if someone sent them—”

“Why are you telling me this?” George cuts him off and looks at him blankly. “I don’t care. Whatever happened between you and Dream has nothing to do with me. Or you and Thomas and Dream, fuck— I don’t care. I don’t even care.”

David stares at him long and hard, cold grey eyes looking to pierce through him. George is too used to that to flinch. He stares back.

“Calm down,” David finally spits. “Was just trying to update you.”

“Miracle you even have a backbone without Thomas here,” George mutters under his breath, dunking the spoons under hot water.

“I just think it’s weird,” David continues on like he didn’t hear him, and George is about to give him a piece of his mind, but he stops when he hears what David says. “You two didn’t talk to each other at all at first, and then now you’re best friends. Didn’t take you as the type to get acquainted quickly,” he notes. “You didn’t with me and Thomas.”

George wants to grab him by the collar and shake him so hard his neck snaps.

“Okay,” he says instead, placing the spoons in one of the steel containers, trying to stifle the urge to be worried.

“He has something on you,” David concludes. “You’re worried he’s going to—”

“I’m done,” George states, walking over to the sink a few feet over. “Gonna wash my hands and go up to my room if that’s alright with everyone else.”

The guys organising the fridge behind him make some sort of noise of acknowledgement, so George takes it as his cue to leave.

“George,” David calls out, and George turns to look at him.

David studies him, like there’s a secret hidden underneath his skin that he’s desperate to uncover. George feels like there is nothing left of him to uncover. As uncomfortable as he is, he’s accustomed to being watched. Then, David smiles, white teeth on display.

“Didn’t peg you as the type, George,” David says, and George fights his worse judgement and decides to head upstairs and wipe the memory from his brain. “To just take it. Then again, you won’t even fight your own battles, so—”

George leaves, convinces himself indifference is the best thing for him to offer back, and that he’s not running, not again.

He kind of wishes David had done something worse, and that George could strike back without

feeling like it was possible that he was blowing it out of proportion. He doesn't understand what exactly he's wishing for when he's begging fate these days. A disaster, or a miracle, or some fucked-up hybrid of the two.

Dream is asleep when he enters the bedroom, eyes closed as the moonlight kisses the bridge of his nose.

He thinks of him with his eyes closed; the way the sun casts pools of honey across his back in the evening, the way he goes wide eyed when he's surprised, the way he licks over his teeth in frustration. Then, he wills Dream out of here, out of Jericho, into a sports jacket and pants that go up to his stomach, walking into a living room larger than the entire attic.

Maybe they're not lovers, not meant to be lovers. That's what George is meant to believe. Then he thinks of the pads of Dream's fingers ghosting over his shoulders, the weight of him lying on top of George, thinks of the tender smiles and the shared moments and George wonders, angrier than he is upset, what could be so wrong about this.

George has begun bargaining with fate.

It would be laughable if it wasn't pathetic; boy at the altar, clutching the cross on his neck so tightly that it leaves an imprint behind in his palm, tears budding in the corners of his eyes, Dream's cologne still stuck to the collar of his shirt. He's torn the cord from the landline and now he's screaming into the receiver, begging for a chance to barter with God, and God isn't coming, nobody's coming, and George doesn't know what to make of any of it.

The night on the ski lift plays on loop every time he closes his eyes. He tries to cement it into his memory, deeper than it already is, pushes away any other thought that dares to cloud the last moments he had before everything collapsed.

Dream and the quiver of his voice, looking at George with desperation for the last time, cheeks flushed in the cold of the evening, cap drawn over his ears, believing in him. "What do you make of me?"

The space between George and the ground, skis dangling over the abyss.

He didn't have an answer then. "I don't know."

He receives more understanding than he thinks he deserves. Dream holds his hand under the table at dinner when he returns to their room looking sickly. It makes it worse because it feels like pity. He's on high alert, eyes darting to every corner of the room to ensure that nobody catches a glimpse of them, but nobody looks in their direction today. He sees a girl he's never seen before talking to Sister Catherine, waving her hands in the air as she speaks, a boy next to her with his hand settled on her waist.

When they get back upstairs, before Dream can escape to the shower, George grabs his wrist.

"Can you read to me?" he asks, trying to decode the expression on Dream's face as they look at each other, empty intensity. "It's just been a while. I miss it."

Dream clears his throat. "Okay. Pick one, I'm going to go shower."

“Can’t you pick—”

“I want *you* to pick one, George,” Dream says the words quietly, and the room goes silent.

They stare, the carnal desire of the preceding weeks gone, melted into some vacant obsession. They’ve grown bored of each other. *Dream has grown bored of him.* There is nothing left for them. *George cannot pretend that Dream is just a body any longer.* It is futile to try and explore any more of each other. *George is teetering on the edge of something terrifying.* There is something more there that the both of them are ignoring out of fear. *George is going to fall in love with him.* He’s waiting for the wind to push him into the abyss, to give him permission to freefall. George is sick of searching for permission from fate. He’s severing the rope tied to his wrists, binding him above ground. *George is going to die.* At the hands of God, at the hands of fate, at the hands of the life he keeps yearning for.

It’s the perfect metaphor for their entire relationship, George thinks numbly. George needs and Dream gives, George is afraid of being alone and Dream is convinced he can do anything alone. George doesn’t want to be alone.

“Okay,” he says. “I’ll wait for you on your bed.”

Dream nods. George feels ridiculously out of place.

He cards through the pages, skims the lines in hope of something sticking out at him. Nothing. He glances over at Dream’s desk, messier than he’s ever seen it. Papers strewn across the top, some creased and others torn into pieces. He sits on the bed empty handed. When Dream emerges, shrouded in fog, hair still damp against his forehead and the neckline of his shirt wrinkled, George averts his gaze. The bed dips next to him. Creaks.

“You’re empty handed,” Dream notes.

“I wanna talk to you,” George says back, finally daring to look at him again. “Feel like we haven’t talked in ages.”

“We talked yesterday,” Dream says, shifting closer. “Before bed.”

George hesitates. “I mean *really* talk.”

Dream considers this. “Okay. What do you want to talk about?”

The word seminary hangs in the air between them, threatens to come down like an anvil and crush them both. George pushes it away.

“I just— I miss talking to you,” George repeats, unsure of the point he’s trying to make at this point as the water rises in his throat, threatening to push out of his eyes. “I miss— *I miss* you so much, even though you’re right *here*, and— I just. I just.” He exhales. “I just.”

“You just,” Dream coaxes him gently, hand trembling in the air before it rests on George’s shoulder, thumb pressing little circles into the skin as he shifts closer.

The bed creaks, and he dissolves in Dream’s arms, letting himself be held, and it feels like absolution, the way Dream’s hands go to brush the tears streaming down his cheeks against his will, reprieve from fate, and God, and George doesn’t want to the fucking seminary, doesn’t know where he wants to go, what he wants to do, and there is no sanctuary for him outside of this room, but this room is a fucking prison cell, and the roof is going to collapse and the walls are going to swallow him whole before the world even does. He’s sobbing now, the sound grating

against his own ears. It feels pathetic, feels wrong and unallowed, but he can't stop gasping for air and he can't stop shaking and the tears don't stop no matter how hard he tries to swallow them down.

"Dream," George whispers his name and it's everything sacred. "I can't lose you."

Dream's fingers interlock with his own. The wind whistles outside of the window, or maybe George has finally lost it, because he bursts into tears all over again, can't believe *this* is the thing that's supposed to damn him, can't believe wanting to be loved makes him evil.

"Hey," Dream whispers, pulling George close to his chest, closer, and George thinks it isn't enough, nothing could possibly ever be enough. "It's okay, you still have me."

"Now," George chokes on the word before he spits it out. "I have you *now*, but now isn't enough."

He's grasping at Dream's face like he's trying to tether himself to land as the tide inhales, desperately searching for something in Dream's eyes that indicates he wants the same thing.

"George," Dream says gently, hands on his wrists. "We— I don't understand."

Frustration bubbles in the pit of George's stomach as he tries to figure out the right way to spill the words out into the open without potentially losing everything. When he finds none, he closes his eyes, prepares to take the jump.

"Dream," George says his name again, because he likes the way it feels on his tongue, likes the way Dream's shoulders quiver when he says it. "I'm going to fall in love with you."

Dream looks at him, eyes wide and cheeks flushed, so fucking lovely George needs to kiss him again, and again, and again and again and again and again until his lungs give out.

"George," Dream says his name, tightens his grip around him. "I just— I don't know what we're supposed to do. About that."

The stars cave in and the sun blinks out. "What?"

"I just—" Dream glances towards the window, and back at him. "I don't know. We're both—we've got things we've already committed to, and—"

George feels his stomach sink down. "What?"

"I just don't want—" Dream stops himself, before swallowing hard and averting his gaze towards the bedsheets. "I don't—I don't think I can take the aftermath."

"The aftermath?" George's eyebrows furrow as he asks for clarification. "What do you mean, the aftermath?"

"When you leave," Dream looks to the floor, and then back at him. "Because you're leaving, and —"

"I don't want to go to the seminary," George finally spits it out.

The admission, ironically, is what gets rid of the chronic guilt he's been carrying with him. George doesn't want to go to the seminary. That doesn't make him a criminal. George doesn't know what he wants, five, ten years down the line. He knows he wants to wake up next to Dream tomorrow. That makes him guilty.

He places his hands in Dream's palms, brings his knuckles to his mouth, presses a kiss to the dip in between each one. Dream exhales, and George wants him like he's never wanted him before.

"Dream," George whispers, and this time it's a confession. "I want to wake up next to you in the mornings."

The bone jutting out of Dream's neck bobs as George presses a kiss to his palm. "I want to be with you."

"You are with me—" Dream starts, but George cuts him off.

"Properly," he argues. "I don't— this is killing me. This is killing you."

He can't bear the distance any longer, can't deal with the way their connection is deteriorating and how the rot has begun to eat him from the inside, the way the sickness has spread to Dream as well.

"I care for you very deeply, George," Dream says quietly. "And I— I feel like you're one of the only people that I've ever really let see me. But I can't do this with you. For both of our sakes."

George feels the hope that had been so desperately pushing its way to the surface sputter out. "What?"

"George," Dream says, and it feels like an apology before a mercy kill. "I can't— I can't do anything more than this. I can't give you any more of me than I already have."

This is where he is meant to accept the rejection, but all he feels instead is red hot frustration, anger simmering low in his belly. The tide kisses the shore like it hadn't threatened to swallow the land whole. Dream looks at George, and George is sure that he can't possibly grasp the intensity of what he feels for him right now. It's the only explanation.

"I thought you wanted me to not go to the seminary," George chokes out. "I'm willing to do that, for you—"

"I don't want you at the seminary," Dream states, hands retracting from George as he hunches in on himself.

"I'm not going," George reminds him, desperate now. "So what's stopping you?"

Is it me? Are you bored of me? Was it too much to handle then, am I not offering enough now? I want to give you my livelihood. It belongs to you.

"This wasn't part of— this wasn't supposed to happen," Dream mutters. "I didn't think we would end up like this."

The eye of the storm closes in and swallows the two of them whole.

You know me more than anyone else. We've been here for a fraction of a moment. A moment is all we are ever going to get. I want to give it to you. Take it from me.

"Like what?" George asks, even though he knows the response will drive a dagger into his chest.

"George," Dream starts. "When you— all I ever wanted was for you to be happy. I didn't think— I didn't anticipate that you would care about me."

George frowns, goes to speak but decides against it.

“And that is terrifying,” Dream admits. “I don’t know what— I just wanted you to stop lying to yourself. When I met you.”

The numbness travels slow into his bloodstream. He worries that Dream still sees him the same way he was when he had first arrived here; afraid and full of some unidentifiable determination. He supposes he’s still the same, but he’s fundamentally different somehow, he swears it.

“I didn’t think that you,” Dream pauses, closing his eyes as he inhales, exhales. “I didn’t think you would do *this* to me.”

The silence is heavy.

“Do what to you?” George breathes out, greedy for something, anything.

Perhaps Dream will kill him, finally, with the words he picks out to drive a dagger into George’s chest. He welcomes the incoming sting— the anger at his indecisiveness, the entitled nature of George’s affection. *Sorry Dream, I’m ready now, even though you needed me to be ready earlier. Take me or leave me. I’m leaving in a few weeks.* Something darts along the walls in the corner of his vision again, and he whips his head around to get a look at it. He blinks and shakes his head. All the time in here must be getting to him.

“I don’t know,” Dream responds quietly.

They’re back to where they started.

The conversation dies out with no real resolution. They’ve fallen into that habit again.

“So why?” George asks, staring up at the ceiling. “I’m not going to the seminary. We can—”

“I’m happy you’re not going to the seminary,” Dream cuts him off. “I think that— I’m happy you’re going to be happy.”

“I will be,” George wills himself to say it. “And you can be too—”

“George,” Dream cuts him off. “I’m really glad that— what are you doing next, then?”

“No idea,” George whispers, and the adrenaline hits for the first time, and he’s giddy with excitement at the prospect of finally, finally being able to seize control of destiny. “Come with me.”

Dream shakes his head no. “I can’t.”

George is confused.

“So why can’t we be happy together?” George dares to question, crossing his arms over his chest. “We can—”

“You’re still leaving,” Dream reminds him, pressing his lips together for a moment before he speaks again. “And I’m happy for you, George. I really am. But it was— you leaving was for you, not me. I’m going to be staying here.”

[the ghosts are laughing full poem](#)

i forgot to link this in the earlier chapter (very sorry just been a little scatterbrained) but please go check out this amazing [art by MorataArt](#)
hope u all liked this chapter. really thankful for all the lovely comments u are all my lifeblood!! come say hi lmk what u think (it really helps me figure out wtf to do next lol.). see u in the next one love u all lots

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deleirium

Chapter Summary

My grief was a madwoman who had been locked for years in the attic. Finally freed, she set fires. She was an animal. She would not be locked away again. *My therapist tells me to love her*, I said. *But I think I need to kill her.*

- Melissa Febos, Abandon Me

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George blinks at him. “What?”

He’s misunderstanding, surely. There is something unnerving about the way Dream’s shoulders hunch in, the way his head lolls forward so that he’s staring at the ground instead of at George, like he’s trying to cave in on himself and disappear. But there isn’t anything to worry about, he’s sure of it. There’s just some sort of misunderstanding.

George reaches out to put a hand on his shoulder. “But I’m— I said I wouldn’t go. To the seminary.”

“I’m happy for you,” Dream repeats. “Really. All I want is for you to be happy.”

“But why are you staying here?” George asks, incredulous. “We can—”

“No,” Dream cuts him off sharply, standing up from where he’s sitting. “We— I can’t— I can’t. I can’t leave.”

“Why not?” George crosses his legs and lengthens his torso in an attempt to look up at him. “It’s— we can get out of here.”

“You can get out of here,” Dream corrects him. “I never said that I would leave.”

“But I thought—”

“You thought wrong,” Dream cuts him off.

George looks at him again, searching for some sort of explanation as to why he’s acting like this. “But I thought we were going to— I thought we could. Do you have some other thing on your record or something? Is that why you have to stay here?” He gets on his knees, reaches out and takes one of Dream’s hands between his own, desperate now for something to ground him. “You can tell me. I can help you.”

Dream shakes his head and withdraws his hand, and George feels like he’s been stabbed in the chest.

“I just have to stay here, George,” Dream offers no further explanation. “I have to— I have a meeting with one of the Fathers in a bit, actually, if you don’t—”

“The Fathers aren’t here today,” George spits out the words more aggressively than he means. “You don’t have to lie to me to try and get away.”

He regrets being hostile even as the words are leaving his mouth.

“George,” Dream says his name again, and this time it feels like the final nail in the coffin.

“Dream,” George repeats, and they’re going in circles, reduced to nothing but warped mirrors desperate to reflect some part of each other, nothing but echoes going back and forth. “Come on. Talk to me.”

“Talk to you?” Dream asks, frowning as he tilts his head to the side, before rolling his eyes and looking away again. “Sure.”

“Yeah,” George, despite the pang in his chest, shifts even closer to him. “Talk to me. Why?”

“I don’t want to talk to you,” Dream finally says. “About this. In case that wasn’t clear.”

“Don’t do this, c’mon,” George pleads following Dream as he walks to the door. “Dream, I don’t— what? I don’t understand. You’re blindsiding me.”

“I need some space,” Dream repeats, and then they look at each other, and George is hit with the crippling realisation that they don’t know each other, not really that well at all.

Not as well as he thought he did, because in his head this was meant to go differently. This was supposed to be the turning point, the moment they decide to step out of the fog together, choose to choose each other, carve out something different for themselves, proof that they are not doomed. Instead, it feels like the first stone down the mountain in an avalanche. George’s chest rumbles.

“Dream,” George’s voice trembles as he says it, and this manages to get through to Dream, somehow, because he sees the corner of his mouth twitch. “Please. We don’t have to talk about it right *now*, but—”

This is it. Weren’t you waiting for me? I thought you were waiting for me.

“I don’t want to talk about it ever,” Dream crosses his arms and leans back on the door, stares down at George like he’s a stranger.

“I know you,” George whispers, desperate for it to be true. “I know you. You don’t want to be here.”

Dream’s jaw clenches. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

The thunder stops before the rain even has a chance to fall.

They sleep in their own beds that night, Dream faces the wall and hides under the covers, and George stares at the ceiling the same way he always does, trying not to gasp for air too loudly as his chest heaves up and down into the night. He feels anger and betrayal and hurt, and for a fleeting moment, he thinks that if Dream is going to stay here and let himself fucking rot inside this place, then George will rot the same in the seminary.

He turns his head towards Dream, nothing more than a bump underneath the duvet. All he knows of Dream is what he wants to become, and all Dream really knows of George is everything he’s afraid he is, both of them stuck orbiting the parts of each other that they know are safe.

Some part of George aches at the knowledge of Dream not trusting him enough to tell him why he feels like he has to stay here, why he's given up on himself so early. He wonders how long it took for Dream to resign himself to this fate, content with microdosing justice to the undeserving people that also lived on the grounds, content with never wanting more for himself.

"You're not happy," Dream had whispered. "You're miserable. I can tell, because I'm miserable and you're starting to look like me. You don't like it here, and you can lie to yourself, but you're not fooling me—"

The anguish never settles, instead chooses to lurch around in his stomach, reminding George that even when someone wants to save him, he's bound to make himself guilty, guilty, guilty. He thinks of Dream, the way he's selfless even in anger, the way he's been trying to advocate for George before George even figured out what it was he really wanted.

"What are you going to do when you leave here?" George asks, turning onto his side to look at Dream.

The question visibly takes him aback. George watches his gaze harden, his jaw shift as his fingers tense. The tightness dissolves after a moment, and then Dream speaks.

"I don't know."

George doesn't know how he's supposed to respond to that. "I'm sure you'll figure something out."

And then he curses his own passiveness, curses himself for getting so wrapped up in himself that he missed what was obvious all along. Dream doesn't plan on leaving. George has been planning their lives together on this sinking ship, and Dream is the only one that's bothered to push one of them onto a lifeboat. The hours bleed into each other as the night drags on. For George, sleep never comes.

He wakes up to someone pounding their fist on the door. Dream shoots up into a sitting position at the same time as him, glances over at George and asks if he knows who that could be. When George shakes his head no, Dream climbs out of bed, runs a hand through his hair as he goes to answer it. George hears Sister Catherine's voice tell him good morning, and then he asks to speak with Dream in the hall. The door closes, Dream not as much as glancing behind himself.

He supposes there's no point in wasting the day. He drags himself to the bathroom, brushes his teeth, observes himself in the mirror. He widens his eyes, bares his teeth, but it doesn't feel as though it's his own reflection staring back at him. The fatigue doesn't go away, not when he turns the shower dial all the way cold, not when he sits on the floor, naked and cold and shivering as his eyes struggle to keep open. He barely manages to make it back inside the bedroom.

There was too much in yesterday, he tells himself. His mind races as it tries to pick up the fragmented pieces of everything he had reminisced upon the night before. It's too much, all over again. George falls back into bed, eyes fluttering as he floats between consciousness and the fog.

He's unsure how long he sleeps, but he's awoken as he feels himself being pulled into someone's arms.

"Are you awake?" Dream murmurs from above him, voice quiet.

Fingers card themselves through George's hair, gentle. He presses his cheek firm against the fabric of Dream's sweater, pulls the covers over his head with one hand.

"Kind of," George mutters, and he wonders if it's worth bringing up, worth risking another fight for.

Dream's finger traces the outer shell of his ear, brushes down his neck, perpendicular to his jaw, and George feels if he were to press just a little harder, he just might undo him completely. Dream is too gentle for that, unfortunately.

"I'm sorry," Dream says the words like they're a confession. "For getting angry yesterday."

George opens his eyes and looks up at him. Dream stares back, half smiles. All he can do is feel sorry for him.

"Not angry at you," he finally manages to say. "Just—"

"George," Dream pleads. "Not now. Please."

George knows it would be selfish to continue, especially after Dream had been so patient with him not wanting to let go of the seminary. "Okay."

Dream beams down at him, pulls George up so that he's laid across Dream's lap, elbow cradling his head. "How'd you decide you didn't want to go to the seminary?"

George feels his head spin as the back of his eyes burn, and he wonders if he's come down with a fever, or something. "Just, a lot of things."

"Really?" Dream asks, voice soft, the way he'd talked to him the night they'd first kissed, when George had felt invincible despite it being nothing but an invitation to catastrophe.

He wonders, briefly, if the suffering is worth having Dream now. A few weeks ago, he would have said yes without hesitation, but today, he isn't confident that he would say the same. He looks at Dream, dehydration lines beginning to reappear, the worry etched permanently into his features.

"Yeah," George chooses not to elaborate any more.

"Missed you," Dream whispers, before tugging away the blanket so that it falls to the floor, positioning himself over George, mouthing at the skin of his neck.

George closes his eyes, exhales. "When did you miss me? I've been here."

"I dunno," Dream mutters, the syllables melting into George's skin. "Just don't like being apart."

George wants to call him a liar, because if he really meant it, they wouldn't be leaving each other.

"You okay?" Dream asks, pulling away, bumping the tip of his nose into the dip of George's cheekbone. "You're quiet."

George doesn't dare ruin this while he still has it, so he rolls his eyes. "Maybe you're just not doing a good job."

Dream grins down at him, not the slightest bit deterred, and George wants him as close as he can have him.

"I'm not doing a good job?" Dream asks, lips ghosting over the apple of George's cheek as the

hand that's not propping him up rests on George's hip.

George swallows hard as their eyes meet, cutting into each other with intensity. This time, George thinks, it doesn't feel like the world is ending. This time, it feels like he is dying, insides spilling out onto the mattress, laying in a pool of his own blood, like roadkill.

Dream dips down and kisses him, hips pressing George into the mattress. When they pull away, his eyes have gone dark, and George almost can't bear to look at him.

"You look pretty like this," Dream whispers. "Like— like this."

"Thanks," George mutters, turning his head to the side as his cheeks burn red.

"You're welcome," Dream dips down, kisses the centre of his collarbones.

George's hands travel underneath Dream's shirt, and he places his hands flat against his sides. It's a little overwhelming, the way he feels like the two of them are burning up against each other, twin supernovas headed for destruction. George curses their circumstance, and he curses himself for being gay, and then he curses Dream for being gay, and then tears well up in his eyes when he realises what he's doing. Dream, who George should know wholly by now, who will remember George as lost flesh, who George will remember as tragedy. It's horrible.

Dream takes both of George's hands in his as he pulls away, places his ear against George's chest, and George wonders how something like this could ever be reduced into an anomaly of nature, could be compared to plague and depravity and blasphemy.

"Your heart's beating really fast," Dream announces.

George swallows down the tears, keeps his voice steady. "Yeah?"

"Yeah," Dream agrees, pausing for a moment. "Means I make you nervous." He drags George's hand along with his own as he pokes George in the ribs. "Means you like me."

"I do like you," George says, quietly.

The room goes silent for a few moments.

"George," Dream says his name, and it makes George sick to his stomach. "I don't— I just..."

George closes his eyes, waits for an explanation he doesn't think is coming.

"Do you want to keep going?" Dream asks, and George hums, keeping his eyes closed.

"Sure," George surprises himself with just how fucking broken he sounds.

Dream looks up at him to check in, eyes concerned. George offers him a half smile.

"Can you undress me?" George sits up and puts his forehead against Dream's shoulder, cringes as soon as he's sure his face is out of view.

Dream is sweet to him, hands dragging across his sides, holding him to his chest to keep him warm. *You don't have to do that*, George wants to say.

"Do you think if we met somewhere else, we could have— that things would be better for us?" George blurts out, right before Dream goes to wrap a hand around him.

Dream looks taken aback by his question. "I mean— yeah. I feel like anywhere is better than here."

Anywhere is better than here.

So would you love me there? George wants to ask. If we met in my hometown, as children. If I'd met you in the woods instead. *God, you don't even know about what happened to me in the woods. I don't even know about your hometown.*

His blood turns to ice water as Dream mouths at the junction between his neck and his shoulder as he grinds down against him, slow.

Are we any better than strangers? George wants to ask as he gasps, hips moving forward. *Strangers that have seen the worst in each other. Strangers who see something good inside of the rubble. What do you know about me, Dream? What do I know about you?*

God, George calls for Him when he's still lying in bed, while Dream runs a washcloth over his stomach. What are we doing to each other?

George wonders if he could convince Dream to leave with him if he told him he loved him. George loves him. He's been coming to terms with it every time he sees Dream in sunlight, feels the hot determination to make sure that he always keeps him lovely.

How do you love me? George wants to ask him. *Would you keep me safe? Would you try to make me laugh? Would you slip poems underneath my pillow, penned in blue ink, lines crossed out, a note in the corner of the pages?*

"Lying here afterwards is nice," Dream admits in the silence. "I like when you stay still."

"What does that mean?" George asks, eyelids already heavy again.

Dream's shoulder moves against his. "I don't know. I feel like you're always— you're always moving around, doing things. Going places. I like having this time with you. Here."

"Sorry," George says, because he isn't sure what more to say.

Dream shakes his head no. "Don't be sorry. It's good."

"I like spending time with you," George confesses, even though surely Dream must already know.

Dream laughs. "Yeah. There isn't much else to do here, I suppose."

"That's not why," George tells him, and he turns his head to the other side.

Dream is right about him, always having to move, shift, run away. George does nothing but hide truths and attempt to get by. It's how he's gone through his entire life. He needs to be honest here. The consequences, even though he's not quite sure what they are, feel deadly.

"I like being around you," George continues. "Even if there were other people here that I liked. I'd still like you most."

Like you most, George echoes the thought in his head. *Enough to risk everything.*

"Oh," Dream says back, quietly, like he isn't quite sure what to say.

George is sure that his body has creased and moulded itself to accommodate Dream's limbs against his. A dip in his stomach for Dream's head to lay on, divots in his fingers so that he can slot his

hand more easily into Dream's.

It feels like the two of them are bleeding out, side by side. George wonders if the two of them were to be buried together, if it would be in one coffin or twin graves. He opens his mouth to ask Dream, ghost of a genuine smile as he tries to think of what kind of humour Dream would find in something like that, but when he sees a tear rolling down onto the side of his cheek, he elects to keep quiet.

"Do you want to hold me?" George whispers.

When Dream pulls the two of them against each other, digging his chin into the top of his head like he's trying to anchor himself to him, like they could chain themselves together and be rid of this wretched lifetime and this wretched place just by agreeing to have each other. It's not enough.

"Dream," George whispers. "*Please.*"

He doesn't know what he's asking for; for Dream to love him, for Dream to leave with him, for an explanation as to why it has to be like this. He clutches onto him, tighter, like it makes a difference.

Dream doesn't answer. George grieves in the arms of a dead man.

Chapter End Notes

yeahh.... #awks. thank u for all the kind words on the last chapter, would love to know your thoughts again if you feel inclined to share them :) see you in the next one

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relapse

Chapter Summary

I had a dream last night that you and I are painfully connected.

- Liv & Ingmar

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They attend an assembly early in the morning about the last mass, and Sister Catherine hands out instructional packages about how they're all expected to lead in prayer for a portion of it. She goes on and on about how for those of them that are here out of court mandate will be reassessed to see if they need to spend another session here, and emphasises that her office door is always open in the scenario any of them need guidance.

When they're left to talk amongst themselves while she hurries to the back of the room to discuss something with one of the priests, George sits next to Dream in silence. Sister Catherine drops by their table, asks if there's anything in their room that perhaps needs tending to, since they're expecting a health inspector in a couple of weeks.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing bugs crawling up and down the walls," George informs her. "But I'm not sure if it's just a trick of the light."

She says she'll send someone up in the coming days to take a look, before hurrying off towards another table. Afterwards, they're dismissed to their rooms, to work on their prayers.

He isn't sure if he has any more lies inside of him, any more confessions and fake revelations. *It's the last one*, he tries to convince himself, but still he thinks of nothing. *The last time you have to do this, and then never again.*

George pulls his chair up next to Dream's desk, and they work on their respective assignments like everything is fine, like they aren't caught in an endless cycle of reaching and falling short, unable to understand each other. He racks his brain for something to talk about, but nothing rises to the surface, nothing left to say about God and salvation and supposed unconditional love. The words don't come. He groans in frustration, dropping his pen to the surface of the desk.

He glances over at Dream, who's given up earlier than he has, and is now drawing spirals in the corner of his page. George watches the blue ink on the ballpoint of the pen move round and round and round, the shape complex to the point where he can't tell where exactly he had started drawing. A pool of blue grows in the centre of it, where Dream's pen is forced to go through every time he starts a new circle. It grows bigger and bigger and bigger. When Dream notices him watching, he drops it.

"Any luck?" Dream asks him.

George shakes his head no. "You?"

Dream shakes his head no. "I might just not do it." He laughs, but it sounds like a scoff. "What're

they gonna do, threaten to keep me in here longer?”

George closes his eyes, and he hears the pen drop onto the desk. He’s been rehearsing in his head how he plans for the conversation to go once he gets out of here. If everything goes accordingly, Jericho will report that George was good, and his parents will give him a few days of space. Then, he plans on announcing that he isn’t planning on going to the seminary, and that he’s going to do something else. He isn’t quite sure what, but at this point, George is willing to commit to anything. If he can at least get to college, and then get a job, he’s sure he can figure it out from there. In the situation that he’s kicked to the curb...

He isn’t quite sure what there *is* for him to do. There are no open shelters back in his hometown, just a church down the main street that hosts as a residential space for the less fortunate during the winter months. He looks over at Dream, and he thinks that he’s sick and tired of lying and hiding, of veiling parts of himself in hopes of acceptance.

“I never told you the whole story of how I got caught,” he starts, and his heart thuds around in his chest, the familiar humiliation and guilt and feeling of helplessness burning in his chest, but he thinks that this time, this suffering is necessary.

Dream drops his chin to the desk as well, frowns. “Is everything alright?”

“No,” George answers, point blank. “But I— I did something really stupid. I feel like if I had just held back, a little longer, then I wouldn’t have had to be here. But then, I feel like I’d be just as sad as I am now, only I’d be sad back at home, and I’d have no idea what to do about it.”

Dream watches him patiently, tilts his head to the side. “Oh.”

The courage melts quickly. “Yeah.”

He observes Dream for a moment, who seems to have forgotten all about what George had wanted to tell him, is now tracing his eyes down the curl of his lip, down to his collarbones. They end up in bed not much later, but George can’t look him in the eye, so he stares at the ceiling while Dream mouths at the skin of his neck, just underneath his collar. He’s dizzy as Dream’s hands make their way over his hips, reach underneath his waistband, and he’s gone. There is no afterglow, just the realisation that time won’t stand still no matter how much he wills for it to. He’s too unfocused afterwards to even get Dream off properly, getting to the point where Dream just presses a sweet kiss to the corner of his mouth and tells him to leave it.

He feels awful as Dream wraps his arms around him, as they fall asleep together beneath the lazy sunlight, and he tries his best to picture it as something else. The two of them, in a little house with a painter’s room that overlooks a field of dandelions, waking to Dream sat by the window, pushing the seeds caught in the netting of the window out into the wind with his fingers. And then he feels worse for imagining it because he knows it’s something he won’t be able to have, and he forces himself to lie still as Dream sleeps because he likes the way his arms feel when they’re wrapped around him.

He’s fallen ill.

George is accustomed to the way everything his gaze lands upon withers away, how everything he tries to love becomes guilty by association. But something has shifted, either inside of him or inside of the universe, because now, things are different. His eyes stay open as light slides through the cracks of the window, Dream wound tightly around him, and it is different.

He dares to trace his finger over the divet in Dream’s arm, the neat slope of the tendon, life

thrumming underneath the surface. Dream shifts in his sleep, but does not wake. George tilts his head and kisses over the high of his cheekbone, and then kisses him again on the temple. Something fizzles inside of his stomach. It feels like some version of acceptance.

They are so different. George wonders if he would see him differently if he knew what exactly had happened to him. His throat closes up when he realises just what he's allowed this life to do to him, the way he lays there and just takes the worst of it. Dream kicks and fights and claws, and George closes his eyes and waits for the storm to pass. Through osmosis, through some sort of fucked up exchange that he can't explain, they've taken the worst of each other and done something wicked. George is going to take his chances against the current, and Dream wants to survive where he is. It's what they're supposed to have done to each other, he supposes. Make themselves better suited for the lives they're going to lead.

The skin between Dream's eyebrows creases. He exhales, and it's the same as George, and he doesn't understand how he's supposed to sever this tie and move on like nothing has happened. Dream hurts the same as him, loves him the same, he foolishly tries to persuade himself into believing. There is reciprocation, but it's warped and flipped sideways and meant to make the two of them believe that they're too different to work, but George lets himself hope. He looks over at Dream like a man hunched over water, trying to make sense of his own reflection.

Like me, he thinks. *Like me, like me, like me.*

He doesn't want Dream to wake up alone. Partially because he hates waking up alone, partially because he hopes that something inside of Dream is inspired by the sight of his sleeping body too. *We are safe with each other,* George thinks. *Only with each other here.*

He thinks of the rolling hills and the forest, the drop beneath his feet on the skilift and the winding road leading them out of here.

I would keep you safe, he thinks as he presses his thumb into the inside of Dream's thigh, still tightly wrapped around him to keep him in place. *I would keep you safe anywhere.*

He manages to untangle their limbs and roll off the bed, tiptoes towards the bathroom, determined to get back as soon as he can. He expects to look worse than he does when he catches his reflection in the mirror. The hollowed skin underneath his eyes makes him look worse than he feels. It's his body trying to return him into a state of self destruction, reminding him that the nights where he and Dream touch and kiss and mouth at skin and fight before sleep makes the two of them suck the life out of him. *This is how it should feel.*

It's awful, but it's better than the numbness. At least he's alive.

George's hands tremble as they tug at the fat of his cheeks. His belly hollows out, and he's tired, so tired, but he's standing on his own two feet, more sure of who he was than the last time he had seen himself.

When he climbs back into bed, he talks to Dream's sleeping figure, cards his fingers through his hair as he does.

I love you, he thinks of the boy prying open the floorboards, and he thinks of the boy who talks with his fists, and he thinks of the boy who wants him to save himself more he wanted to survive, and Dream loves him the same, he's sure of it now, regardless of whatever he tries to tell George in an attempt to cut the ties between them to make leaving easier.

"I love you," he says it out loud, and he's jumping off the ledge, slipping underneath the safety bar

and into the open darkness. “I love you.”

It doesn’t ache the way he expected it to. The ceiling doesn’t come down and crush the two of them, and the wind whistles outside the window like nothing of significance has happened at all. George kisses over Dream’s eyelids, swallows down the hurricane in his throat, repeats the truth for an audience of nobody. “I love you.”

“Everyone out there,” George exhales. “Everyone out there is good, because there’s a book on how to be good, and there’s somebody watching that’s gonna damn ‘em to hell if they’re not good enough. But you—” it comes out accusatory, incriminating, passionate and betrays the intensity of what he feels, and he thinks let it. “—you are *so good*. You are good because you want to be good. Even if what you believe is good isn’t what everyone else thinks is good.”

And then, because he’s only a man, the tears roll down his cheeks and it feels as though the two of them are being torn apart despite the fact that they’ve still got time, but the time is doomed, and George grieves because half of him will be taken in the wreckage, half of him will be gone.

“I know what they’ll say,” he confesses, the words tumbling past his lips. “I know they will call it wrong, and unnatural, and— God, I just— I look at *you*, and I wonder what could be wrong about *this*.”

Dream looks harmless when he sleeps, like nothing in the world could touch him.

“And maybe,” his voice cracks down the middle, “maybe they’re going to think that we’re— that I’m evil for this, that I’m unnatural, and that I’m wrong— I just—” he takes Dream’s hand in his own, squeezes it as gently as he can. “I don’t care. I don’t care, I don’t care, I don’t care. Let them think whatever they want, I don’t care. I— I’d go to war with the whole world— I’d do it for you.”

It’s hopeless and awful and tragic, the rattling of the chains as the cuffs break off his ankles and his wrists, and George thinks that hope is a wretched, wretched thing, to pull people from the brink of death and make them live knowing that it could happen again, that next time the tether could snap and send them into the void. “You are so brave. It makes me want to be brave.”

He’s sobbing now, hiccuping and trembling and inconsolable, so he tangles himself back into Dream, begs and hopes and prays for a miracle to get the two of them out of here. “Don’t make me go alone, please.”

Dream stirs and he presses his palms into his eyes, turns his head to the side as he inhales sharply, wipes his nose on his sleeve, levels out his breathing so that he doesn’t catch him like this, but to no avail. In the heat of feverish honesty, the tears don’t stop, and it feels pathetic, and it feels like salvation. He presses his nose into Dream’s stomach, weeps even louder, loud enough that they can hear him downstairs, and he thinks to let them hear, to let them see the worst of him, let them see the collapse and the rubble before he has a chance to sweep it up in an attempt to make it more manageable. There is nothing for anyone to save, nothing for anyone but him now.

A hand carding through his hair, gentle, so gentle, and George takes them in his own, squeezes hard enough that he knows an outline in the shape of his fingers will form when he lets go.

“I’m sorry,” Dream says, and it’s not enough.

“No,” George begs, shifting over to straddle him, still heaving as the tears come down heavy, heavy, disrupting the peace of the morning. “You can’t stay here. I won’t leave you. I won’t.”

“George,” thumbs pressing into his cheeks in an attempt to stop them, but it’s of no use.

"If you stay, I'm asking to stay," he resorts to this, desperate. "Dream, we can't—"

"I don't have anywhere else to go," Dream spits out, sitting upright and taking George's wrists in his hands. "I don't have anywhere else to fucking go, George, so don't— don't."

"I don't have anywhere else to go either," George wants for it to resonate harshly, the way Dream's words do when he so commandeers them, but it comes out hollow and sagged. "But I'm leaving. I'm leaving because I don't want to fucking rot here—"

"I'm scared," Dream grits his teeth as he squeezes George's wrists again in an attempt to get him to be quiet. "I'm— you don't understand."

"Then make me," George begs, and it feels reminiscent of Sunday mornings at the altar back at home.

"I'm— There's nothing for me outside of here," Dream's grip loosens as he looks to the side, and George watches as he clenches his jaw. "And this is the safest place I have."

"What the fuck is safe about this Dream?" George feels his voice raise in volume out of anger. "What the fuck is safe about keeping yourself locked up here with a bunch of people that would *burn you at the stake* if they found out the real reason you were here?"

"You're being dramatic. It's safer than being out there," Dream doubles down, glares at George with such an intensity that it should make him shrink down, should make him cover and want to apologise and end the conversation the way they always do, but something snaps.

"Then I was wrong about you," and he means for the words to sting, means for them to break skin and reach somewhere deeper, means for them to awaken something worse.

"What were you wrong about, George?" Dream asks, tilting his head to the side and shaking his head. "Say it, then. Say it."

The words die on his tongue when he sees the anguish in Dream's eyes, as he begs for George to set everything they've built here on fire. "No."

"I know what you're thinking."

"You don't," the words slip past gritted teeth.

"You don't know me either."

"Fine," George snaps, grabbing him by the collar of his shirt. "Neither of us know each other. What the hell are we even doing?"

Dream's lip curls into a sneer. "Nothing. This is nothing."

George tugs him closer. "Don't fucking lie."

"It is though," Dream goads him on. "You're leaving and I'm staying, and we fool around more than we talk. You've only cared about me since I started putting out."

He says the words like they're meant to hurt. They slice through his vocal chords and leave him without words, make him want to sink to the bottom of the ocean and never be seen again, but he doubles down.

"If that's what you think of me," George swallows down the tsunami threatening to leak out from

his eyes. “Then you know me even less than I thought you did.”

“So why are you here?” Dream leans forward so that George collapses backwards, so that he looms over him. “What do you see in me that makes this—”

“I wanna take care of you,” George blurts it out. “I see you, and I need to keep you safe, and—”

“So this is charity?”

“Stop twisting my words,” he spits venom again. “Stop making me out to be someone awful just because you’re too much of a coward to want to leave.”

Coward. The word acts like a twist of a knife. Dream doesn’t look at him in disgust or shove himself off, but instead he looks at him with a debased sense of satisfaction, like this is what he was waiting for the entire time.

“So you lied then,” he prods, but George refuses to fall for it. “About loving me because I’m brave, or—”

“Were you awake the whole time?” George asks, willing himself to sound soft, reaching out to ghost his fingers over Dream’s jaw.

Dream exhales, and it hits the crook of his neck. “I hate you.”

“You don’t,” George persists, and his hand goes to cup Dream’s cheek, and Dream is gentle as he pries him off, increasing the distance between the two of them.

“I don’t feel the same way, George,” Dream is trying to sound apologetic, but he’s lying, George knows he’s lying in an attempt to save the two of them from the devastation of finally being pulled apart for good.

“It’s okay,” he swallows down the lump in his throat, and maybe the hope will kill him before the despair does. “It’s fine.”

Dream softens, finally, places the palm of his hand over George’s cheek, and then quietly speaks, like George isn’t meant to hear it. “Sorry.”

George is sure he means it, but he isn’t sure how much more of this he can take before his resolve is worn down into nothing. “It’s fine.”

You’re killing me, is what he thinks. *I want to take you with me, but I don’t know how much more of this I can take. Maybe that’s love.* Dream sits down next to him, shoulder to shoulder in silence again. It’s awful, feels like teeth in his neck. It hurts, but it counts for something, he tries to convince himself. It has to count for something.

Chapter End Notes

do not worry about the chapter count fluctuation i am literally just break dancing. hope u enjoyed see u in the next one

tempest

Chapter Summary

Somebody is always singing. Songs
were not allowed. Mother said,
Dance and the bells will sing with you.
I slithered. Glass beneath my feet. I
locked the door. I did not
die. I shaved my head. Until the horns
I knew were there were visible.
Until the doorknob went silent.

—Tarfia Faizullah, 100 Bells

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Morning brings the end of the world. The weeks continue to dwindle down, and George is left with the difficult reality that he will be leaving here alone. He wakes to a sharp knocking on the door. He sits up, blinks sleep out of his eyes, glances over at Dream in his bed. Still fast asleep. He shivers as he steps onto the cold hardwood of the floor.

Sister Catherine stands in the hallway. “Good morning George. Sorry for waking you.”

“It’s no problem,” he tells her, turning his head to the side to yawn. “Is everything alright?”

“There’s been a snow storm,” she informs him. “And there’s no power. Everyone is to stay in their rooms for the next few hours, just until we can get things sorted. Then we’ll come call you down.”

He nods and she leaves. When he enters back into the room Dream is awake, sitting up.

“Good morning,” George tells him.

Dream beckons him towards the bed. “What did she want?”

“Power’s out,” George sits down beside him. “Told us to stay in our rooms for now.”

Dream hums, then leans back and lays back down, eyes flickering over to George’s hands. “You should sleep here then. With me. To stay warm.”

“To stay warm,” George echoes, but he lifts the covers and climbs in next to him. “Sure.”

Dream presses his forehead to George’s shoulder, lips pressed to his arm. “Sorry. Know you probably can’t stand being around me.”

George could laugh at the absurdity. “What gives you that idea?”

“I’m awful to you,” Dream says the words all too eagerly. “I don’t listen. I get upset at you for wanting to help me.”

"I used to do the same," George tries to find constellations in the popcorn ceiling. "So I'd call us even."

"That was different," Dream insists. "We barely knew each other then."

"Thought you thought we barely knew each other now."

It's silent. George wonders when Dream will run out of excuses. He doesn't even have it in himself to be angry. He knows. He's made them himself, and he'd only been in a place like this for a few weeks. Dream has spent a much greater portion of his life here. For him to be unsympathetic would be wrong.

"Well," Dream hesitates for a moment. "It's just different."

"It's okay, Dream," George reassures him with a sigh, even though it's not. "I understand."

Dream moves to throw his arm over George's torso, watches him carefully like he expects to be reprimanded for it. It aches, just a little; pulls on his heartstrings and makes his chest feel tight, that he thinks George would deny him this, deny himself this, before the two of them part ways.

"Just thinking about missing you hurts," George admits. "I don't know how I'll survive the real thing."

Dream breathes in sharply, and George can feel his chin digging into his sternum. "I'm sorry."

George shakes his head no. "It's— it's not your fault."

The silence is heavy. George pulls the covers over his shoulders. The storm has passed, leaving something hauntingly devastating in its wake. A part of him misses fighting with himself, living in delusion, seeing Dream so passionate about him. He was foolish, for believing that he possessed the strength to take on the world in its entirety, when the reality is that he's going to fail himself once he leaves here. He will. So many times. He's going to avoid the important conversations. He's already put off searching for something he's truly passionate about. It feels like it's too late. Then again, he had thought exactly that about escaping the future laid out for him just a few nights ago.

He wonders when the next revelation will come. What it will bring.

"I don't like hurting you," Dream whispers, hand flat against George's stomach. He presses down, and George exhales. "It makes me feel like a monster."

The pressure lifts. George inhales. "S'okay."

"It's not," Dream whispers. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault," George closes his eyes, and instead of seeing the red of hellfire he sees nothing. Purgatory. "Don't blame you."

"You should," Dream tells him, finger digging between his ribs. "Why don't you?"

"I love you," and the words hold no malice, no ill will. Just acceptance. "And I know we're in a place where you can't love me back. And that's okay. You've done too much for me to deserve being hated."

George places his palm against Dream's, hands clasped together in blasphemous prayer. George is

willing to put the husk of a life he used to occupy at rest for it, to make sacrifice after sacrifice to keep the two of them sacred, and it makes what they have righteous.

"I'm awful," Dream says like it's etched in stone, like it's fact instead of self prescribed destiny. "You're allowed to hate me."

"I don't want to."

"Why?"

It's a good question. George was searching for every reason to justify his dislike for Dream at the beginning of all this, and now, he thinks, Dream could hold a dagger to his throat and tell him he means nothing, and it would be lovely to bleed out while looking into his eyes. The terror has escaped, made room for apathy. George isn't sure if it's good or bad yet.

"You're good to me," he finally says. "Even when you hate me, you're good to me."

"I'm not good."

"You don't believe that."

"I do."

"You don't. You know you're good."

"I'm not," Dream's voice breaks. "I've—I'm just not. I do things because I want to do them. Not because I think they're good."

"Doesn't make you bad."

"What does that make me, then?" Dream pulls him closer, fingers splaying out and pressing into the flesh of his sides. George almost wants for him to dig his fingernails in hard enough to break skin, just for proof that he was real, that he touched him like this. He doesn't ask. It would do no good.

"Makes you human," he turns to his side, pressing a kiss to Dream's forehead. "It's okay."

It's overwhelming, laying together like this, something about it more incriminating than being caught with their hands on each other. His father's Bible has sat on the bedside table collecting dust for ages. There is no more pretending here.

"I always feel like we barely know each other," George confesses. "And I would be sad, about not knowing where you came from. I'd feel like you didn't trust me."

"That's not it," Dream starts, but he doesn't offer anything more.

"I'm sure you have your reasons," he resigns himself to being comfortable with not knowing. "But I don't think it's true that we don't know each other. You know everything I'm not. That counts for something."

Maybe he's salvaging through the rubble, searching for something to keep close to his chest when he leaves, to act as pseudo-closure. Maybe it's true; that they don't need to know all of each other to love each other. Just the worst bits, and the ones that are most private.

"I was waiting for something really bad to happen so that I didn't have to go home and live the rest of my life like this—lying. But then nothing happened. I thought when I got sent here, the world

would end. But it didn't. I keep thinking that when I leave here, I'll just go back to how I was, and pretend to be different, and that I'll just like— I don't know. I think I don't know anything." He laughs, despite it all. "I really don't know what's going to happen, and I wish you were coming with me. But at least I know which things I'm not, and at least I can say it out loud without wanting the world to swallow me whole, so. That counts. That's something. The rest of it will— I don't know. It's not gonna make sense on its own, but I'll see what happens. I'll— yeah."

Dream turns his head and kisses him with his mouth still bitter, somewhere between slow and desperate, and the pit in George's stomach grows deeper and deeper and deeper. They're doomed. It's alright.

"I'm sick of lying," he whispers when they've barely pulled away, when he's breathing in what Dream exhales, when they're so close he can see the pores dotted on his nose. "But it's not my fault that I have to lie."

"Not your fault," Dream repeats, and he kisses him on the nose, cheek, and the crook of his neck.

"I'm not really— I'm not up for anything right now," George admits, and Dream pulls away.

He mourns the absence of heat.

"Sorry," Dream clears his throat, and George watches his throat constrict as he swallows.

"You can still touch me," he offers, feeling like he's been stripped of his skin, like he's laying there as a jumble of organs on display.

He doesn't get a response, so he closes his eyes, tries to make peace with this the way he's made his peace with everything else. Then the bed creaks, and there are two arms bound tightly around him. He feels Dream's heart pound against his back. The wind whistles outside and George knows that the end is near, but he doesn't fight it, doesn't think about torn limbs and landslides and collapse and ruin. He doesn't think about Dream, doesn't think about the life he wants to build, doesn't think about what he's going to do when he gets home. He lays there, refuses to think about anything at all.

The power is back on by midday. He sits through activities, sees them as a means to an end more than anything else. David sits next to him and tries to offer him a smile, but he stares right through. It's his turn to wipe down the tables so he stays after dinner as everyone else hurries into their rooms. George wonders what they're all thinking, if they believe everything here or if they're lying too.

When he returns back to their room, Dream is sitting on the ground. He looks up at him, offers him a smile. "Hello."

George steps inside, closes the door. "Hi."

He's unsure at first, what to do, but then Dream motions for him to come sit next to him, and he obliges. His heart beats in his chest, nervous and giddy as if it was the very first time. Dream has sorted the pages into piles; there's two that are a mix of lined pages and printer paper, and a third that he's tucked away further from the first two.

"I was really surprised," Dream tells him. "That you couldn't figure out that I was gay when I

showed you the Oscar Wilde.”

George blanks, tilts his head to the side. “Oh.”

Dream shakes his head. “He’s just written a lot. About being gay. He went to prison, for sodomy.”

“I don’t read too much,” George admits. “Like— only for school, pretty much. Wouldn’t have known.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

Dream shifts a little closer to him, presses a little square of folded paper into his palm. “Open it.”

George obliges, pries it open with the tips of his fingers, folds it out to eighths, then fourths, then halves. The lettering is neat, and there’s a little drop of black ink in the right corner. Dream hooks his chin over George’s shoulder, and George’s heart pounds in his chest, something electric coursing through his veins. “What’s this?”

Dream exhales. “I think I’m about to make a really bad mistake.”

George looks at him, and it’s like staring into the sun, too much to bear. “What’s wrong?”

“If you leave here, knowing how I feel about you, you’re going to be hurt, and I’m going to be hurt. And if you leave thinking that I *don’t* feel for you the same way you feel for me, you’re going to be hurt, and I’m going to be hurt.”

George doesn’t speak, let him continue.

“We’re in too deep,” Dream smiles and it’s bitter, angry. “Nothing is going to make this easy.”

George sits up straighter. Dream shakes his head.

“There’s no happy ending, to this one,” Dream’s arms snake around his waist, tighten and pull him closer. “The poem, I mean. It’s not really a poem. It’s a letter.”

George closes his eyes, feels Dream extend his legs so that George is positioned in between them.

“Makes me so sad,” he admits. “I don’t— I don’t know what to do. I haven’t thought anything through since you’ve got here. I feel like I don’t know anything, and I’m scared that if I follow you and it ends in disaster, I’m going to end up alone.”

“I would never do that to you,” George says, hoping the conviction comes across. “I would never leave you alone, if you came with me.”

“You’re saying that now, but you haven’t— this isn’t the worst I can get. I can get worse than this.”

“S’okay—” George starts but Dream cuts him off.

“I don’t want to do it like that. I don’t want— I don’t want to hurt you, and I don’t want you to hurt me. I just want to keep what we had before I ruined it in a jar, and I just want to keep living like that forever. I don’t want anything to change.”

“But I do,” George dares to speak the words out loud.

Dream's hands tremble. "What do you mean?"

George places the page to his left so that he can put his hands over Dream's. "I'm not— this isn't sustainable. We can't stay here, like this forever."

"It's safe."

"It's suffocating. You know what would happen if we got caught?"

"We'd get thrown out," Dream squeezes him tighter, like he's afraid George will slip through his grasp. "Why not bid our time here? Until we get it figured out?"

"I don't want to lie anymore, Dream," George admits. "I've lied and pretended to be someone else my whole life, and everyone that thinks they love me actually loves a person that's never existed in the first place. I've spent my whole life trying to be good, and I'm tired of having to be someone else's version of good. I can't do this anymore, I— I just can't."

Dream is quiet for a moment. "Okay."

"We can both do better together," George is careful, doesn't let himself dissolve like last time, presses his thumbs into the gaps between Dream's knuckles. "Better than this."

"Ambitious thing to want," Dream presses a kiss to his earlobe, and George tilts his head back, a little further. "It's good. I'm happy you want more for yourself. You deserve— you deserve more than this."

So do you, he wants to say, but the words stay stuck in his throat, and are left unsaid.

"Read it," Dream's arms loosen again.

"Out loud?"

Dream shakes his head no. "I think that would be too much for me."

George wants to understand what he means when he says things like that, wants to dig a little hole into his brain and take a look at how he's wired. What makes Dream decide what is dangerous? "Okay."

Three lines; the first two in black ink and the last in blue.

"They're from different pieces," Dream explains, pressing his thumb into each one of George's knuckles. "Different excerpts from different letters, where he talks to, or about his— his lover."

George nods, swallows as the air stands still. "Oh."

"It's how I feel about you," it's barely a whisper, so quiet George isn't sure he's meant to hear it.

He understands me and my art, and loves both. I hope never to be separated from him. I feel that it is only with you that I can do anything at all. Do remake my ruined life for me, and then our friendship and love will have a different meaning to the world.

Dream's nails dig into the skin of his palms.

He has also ruined my life, so I can't help loving him — it is the only thing to do.

There are such wide abysses now of space and land between us. But we love each

other. Goodnight, dear.

All the heat in his body rushes to the surface of his skin and George is burning up, he's sure of it. Dream exhales against the back of his neck and it does nothing but fan the flames, and he's nothing but embers now.

"What does this mean?" his voice comes out hoarser than he thinks it will, and he wishes he was a poet, wishes he was someone that could understand the weight of what Dream was trying to tell him.

"Just how I feel," Dream rocks the two of them side to side, gentle, but it feels like being stuck on a lifeboat as the ocean attempts to devour itself. "I write to you sometimes."

George turns his head to look at him. "*This?*"

Dream laughs and holds him tight again, and George wants for him to squeeze hard enough that they become just one person. "No, not this. I'll give them to you, when you leave. To remember me by."

His lungs fill with saltwater. "But I'll see you again. Even after this."

"I'm just going to be here."

"Then I'll go to the seminary, and come back as one of the priests, or something. Then, we can sit together."

Dream laughs again, this time into the skin of his neck, and it's glorious. "Okay, George."

"I can't convince you to leave," George is trembling now, doesn't know if he'll be able to survive just only knowing Dream when the two of them are forced apart.

Dream doesn't respond, just rocks the two of them side to side, the world's bleakest waltz. George lets him. "I don't know if I should tell you."

"Tell me what?" George doesn't know if he can take the pullback from this, doesn't know how he'll fare if Dream goes back to being cold and distant after this. "Tell me."

"It makes things worse," Dream lets go of his hand, drapes himself over George's shoulders this time.

"I don't care," George wills for his legs to stop shaking, for the room to stop spinning, for just a moment of repose before the world and its sorrows swallow them up again. "Tell me."

Dream's lips are pressed together as they meet the skin of his nape, pressing a kiss down the first, second, third ridges of his spine. His hands tangle themselves in the fabric of George's sweater as he tugs him backwards, the two of them as close as they can be, separated only by a few layers of fabric, and yet, this somehow feels much more intimate. Like he's been sliced open and placed under glaring fluorescent lights for inspection.

Dream speaks louder than he has for weeks, unmuffled by fabric, or skin, into the open air. "I love you."

Repentance, holy forgiveness, promises of heaven and her eternal treasures, swallowed into the blackness of uncertainty. Dream and the truth that falls from his mouth, the only real certainly he has. George slumps back into him, lets himself be held.

Then, after a moment. “Sorry.”

“Don’t,” George’s voice comes out sharp. “Don’t be. Promise me you’re not.”

Dream’s touch is gentle now, as his fingers ghost over George’s palm. At least, if he has to leave here without him, he knows that it was real. What he felt. What Dream had felt. What the two of them had shared was not in vain, regardless of where they may be forced to end.

“Okay,” Dream turns his head, kisses the apple of George’s cheek. “I love you. I’m not sorry.”

George tries to picture it. The two of them, older, the lines across Dream’s forehead of age instead of stress. In love without being in hallowed debt.

“Good,” he says.

There is not much more he can say.

Chapter End Notes

slayy this is now my longest fic. what does that mean for the trout population

capsizing

Chapter Summary

Soaping together is sacred to us.
Washing each other's shoulders.

You can fuck anyone,
But with whom can you sit in water?

- Ilya Kaminsky, Deaf Republic

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The night before the final mass, they lie together, a tangle of limbs in Dream's bed. Dream's hand is pressed flat against his back, and they've cracked the window open, just a little. The air is chilly, and there's a sense of finality every time he takes a breath. The end is so close. George almost wants time to move slower, so that he can cherish this for a little longer, but he's trying to be excited about the future. It's foggy and muddled and he hasn't got the slightest clue as to what it entails, but at the very least, it belongs to him.

"What's one thing you want to do before you die?" George asks, ear pressed to Dream's chest, listening for the steady thud below the skin.

Dream thinks for a moment. "I don't know. You go first."

"I wasn't thinking of anything specific," George admits. "It's just— I wish I had something I cared enough about to *really* want it. I could use it as a starting point. I don't know what I'm doing."

"No one knows what they're doing," Dream presses a kiss to his forehead, and the gesture is innocent, but there's red rushing to the apples of George's cheeks. "You're gonna be alright."

"God, I hope so," he laughs, despite everything. "I don't know. We'll— I'll be okay."

"You will."

A draft of wind through the room sends the pages on George's bedside table to the floor, but he doesn't move to pick them up.

"I think I'd want to write a book," Dream's fingertips press into his spine as he quietly says the words. "One day."

George's heart flutters in his chest, and it feels like hope. "That's really nice."

Dream hums. "Yeah. Sorry, I'm just thinking about you leaving."

"I'm thinking about me leaving too," George clings to him a little tighter.

"Just thinking about how I wanna remember you," Dream's thumb traces down the bridge of his

nose, and George closes his eyes.

“I’m not dying,” George whispers, feeling his mouth curve up into a smile as he opens his eyes again, but Dream isn’t laughing.

“I know,” Dream shakes his head and sighs. “You’re— sometimes, I wish I hadn’t met you at all, y’know. Maybe it would’ve been better to just not know how nice things could be before they changed.” He kisses George’s forehead again. “But I think that would be stupid. To just want to be miserable forever.”

George leans forward so that he can kiss him properly, once, twice, and then Dream’s pulls him up into his lap and kisses him again, hard enough that the room spins when he pulls away. He pulls down the zipper of Dream’s sweater with urgency, and then he’s pulling his own shirt over his head and tossing it to the ground. The room is hot, too hot, and he can’t tell if Dream is freezing cold or burning up the same as him when they kiss again, with a sense of urgency that wasn’t there in the times before.

It’s almost too much to bear when Dream’s hands press flat against the skin of his back, smooth down over to his waistband, when he looks up at George for permission with his mouth red and his eyes dark. When George nods and lifts up his hips, he pulls them down, down, and then tosses them to the side. George looks at him, watches his throat as he swallows and rolls over to place George next to him as he finishes undressing, tosses his clothes to the ground, next to George’s.

Then, they look at each other, and George feels the Earth shift and the ground break, feels the impact of every delayed disaster hit all at once as Dream’s eyes rake over him, all of him at once. He wraps his arms around his stomach, but Dream reaches out and grabs his wrists, squeezes, before bringing George’s hands up his face, and then they’re kissing again, mouth to mouth, lined up together, shoulder to shoulder, skin to skin.

Thunder roars in his ears as Dream dips his mouth lower to bite little red star clusters along his collarbones, pads of his fingers pressing into his sides hard enough to bruise, George bites down on his bottom lips, commands himself not to be too loud, but fuck, if Dream isn’t making that difficult. The wind whistles outside, and George wishes it was louder, wishes the world would howl and scream and shout itself hoarse for a while so that he could scream and shout himself hoarse too.

George wonders what he would tell into the abyss if it opened up, and teeth drag against the protrusion of his collarbones, and all George thinks of is Dream and Dream and Dream.

“Want you to remember me,” Dream mumbles, pressing his forehead against George’s chest for a moment, exhaling. “When you get back home.”

“I will,” George promises, words coming out breathy as Dream dives back in, scattering more little marks along his chest.

George lets him, for a little, closes his eyes and melts and tries to commit this moment to memory.

“Wanna go further?” Dream mumbles the question into George’s neck as he presses his fingers into the flesh of the inside of George’s thighs.

George slumps into him, feels his face burn red. “Yeah, I mean— yeah.”

“If you want to,” Dream assures him. “I’m happy with just this.” He kisses just below George’s ear, and the edges of his vision go fuzzy for a moment.

“I want to, just don’t have lube, or anything—”

Before he can finish, Dream is leaning over to his bedside table, arms still wrapped firmly around George to keep him in place as he opens the drawer, and pulls out a bottle just a little smaller than his palm. He holds it out to show George.

“Where did you even get this?” George snorts, taking it from him, inspecting the packaging for an expiration date.

Dream pinches his sides, and George squirms. “Promise not to be mad?”

George frowns. “What did you do?”

“I stole it from the convenience store, kind of,” he claps a hand over George’s mouth before he can reprimand him. “But! I left a few dollars on the shelf in its place. So I’m calling it even.”

George frowns, and Dream laughs at him before he removes his hand, and then kisses him again. Then again, and again and again, until George falls backward onto the bed sheets and Dream is hovering over him, flushed red all the way down to his chest.

“Have you done this before?” Dream asks him, and George nods, places a hand delicately on his arm.

“D’you wanna be on top or on the bottom?” George whispers, propping himself up with his elbows.

Dream hesitates, eyes dropping to the floor next to them before looking back at George.

“It’s okay,” George rubs up and down Dream’s arm, in a manner that he hopes is soothing. “We don’t have to do it just because we can.”

“I want to,” Dream affirms, and George looks down to see that he’s still soft against his leg. “I just — we don’t have any time—”

“We can wait,” George repeats, leaning over to grab their sleeping clothes from the floor.

The bed creaks.

They get dressed in just their pyjama bottoms before Dream pulls George back into his arms, kisses his nape. “Sorry.”

“Why are you sorry?” George asks, swiping his thumb over Dream’s bottom lip. “I’m not mad.”

“I love you,” Dream whispers, and George’s heart swells and threatens to burst.

“I love you too,” and it’s fleeting but doesn’t seem temporary, and it’s damning, but at the very least, it is honest.

They’re wrapped up in each other, George’s back pressed to Dream’s chest, breathing slow when Dream speaks again. “How’d you— did you have a boyfriend? Before you came here?”

George shrugs. “Not really, was just like... seeing people sometimes. In secret. To fool around.”

“Like we’re doing now?”

“Nothing I’ve ever done before was like this,” his voice comes out sharper than he means for it to.

Dream is silent for a moment. “Didn’t mean it like that.”

George relaxes against him, taking Dream's hand in his own. "I know. Sorry."

It's laughable to compare any rendezvous of the past to this. He'd barely known any of the other boys' names, much less anything about them. George had given a fake name on occasion as well, if he recognized them from anywhere. They'd maybe recognized George too, but had elected to keep quiet.

"I just— it's a little funny," he laughs, even though it's not. "I got sent here, because I like— I was planning to meet someone. Out in the woods, back by the house, and they weren't— I don't know. They only asked me to see if I would come."

"I'm sorry," Dream sounds sympathetic. "Did they— did he tell your parents, then? And then they sent you here?"

George shakes his head no, and he remembers being foolish, remembers thinking love was unconditional and that maybe he stood a chance against God in the eyes of his parents. How stupid. His chest hurts.

"Bit more complicated than that," he mutters, but he doesn't offer anything more up front.

Dream waits, presses a kiss to his shoulder.

George thinks of red against the brown of the dead grass, mouth dribbling blood or spit or maybe both. The pain had been cold on his skin, but hot in his stomach, almost felt like he was going to dissipate into the air, converge in on himself and cease to exist. It was suffering, but it almost felt like a chance for repentance.

He'd expected the sight of him to stir more empathy than it did, if he's being honest. At the very least provoke the question of trying to understand *why*, understand *how*, understand that maybe it wasn't a deviant in the hospital bed, but their son.

"He was really angry," George continued, chest heavy, shoulders tight. "I don't know. He just sort of took it out on me and left."

Dream's grip on him tightens. "What?"

George feels the hot shame in his bloodstream. "The guy I was meant to see, I mean. He just sort of beat me up and left, don't worry."

"*Don't worry?*" Dream repeats. "Holy— George. How come you didn't tell me before today?"

George shrugs. "We don't really talk about home."

Dream is still for a little, and George regrets opening his mouth at all, because this is not how he wants Dream to remember him. There's another kiss pressed to his shoulder and it feels like pity, makes George want to crawl out of his own skin.

"I'm sorry I can't tell you," Dream says quietly. "I really want to. I just— it's hard for me to tell people. I haven't told anyone else ever."

"It's okay," George starts.

"I want to," Dream repeats. "I just— I can't. There's something in my throat that makes it close up every time I try."

And George doesn't want to fight, doesn't want to ruin this, not when they're so close to the end.
"Okay."

"I love you," a kiss pressed to the back of his neck, between his shoulder blades. "Thank you."

And even if George could be mad, he doesn't think he would be. He can't find it in himself to be angry with the one person that is on his side, that believes he's capable of escaping the fate laid out for him. Dream loves him despite all of the setbacks. So, George loves him too.

"I'm from Tallahassee," Dream offers the information after the silence. "And I've got two sisters, and a brother."

George closes his eyes, leans back. "I've never been to Tallahassee."

"I haven't lived there very much either," Dream admits, voice still a whisper. "Went to boarding school in Vermont when I wasn't here. And I do sleepaway camp in the summers."

George nods. "Oh."

Dream doesn't say anything else, so George assumes that the conversation is over.

"Thank you for telling me."

He turns his head and Dream smiles. His skin is dull and he looks tired, but at the very least he's smiling. George closes his eyes.

"Tired?" Dream asks the question softly, pulls the two of them down so that they're laying next to each other.

George pulls the covers over their heads, and then kisses at the skin of Dream's neck, taking it between his teeth. "Wanna have you remember me too."

"They're not gonna last all the way through the week," Dream mumbles, and George can't see him but he can feel him, can feel his hands in his hair and his thigh between his legs. "Careful, don't go too high up or they'll see."

"You can tell them it was the bed bugs," George retorts, before continuing with his ministrations.

Dream laughs, belly arching up to press into George's. "Yeah right, like they'd believe me."

"I got bed bugs too," he mumbles. "That's why we're both all bitten."

"*Bitten*," Dream repeats, mocking the way he says it. "*I'm all bitten*."

George sinks his teeth into the junction of his neck in retaliation. "Behave."

"I'm trying," Dream grins, eyes dopey, and he looks stupid, and George swoops down to kiss him on the mouth again. Then, after a few moments, he speaks again. "I'm going to take a shower."

George glances at the clock. "It's nearly midnight."

"It'll be quick," Dream insists. "Do you want to join me?"

"It's not gonna be quick then," George mutters, but he kicks off the duvet, and climbs to his feet.

They don't look at each other as they undress in the bathroom. The water runs, and George hears

the wind whistle outside again. Dream steps into the shower first, and George glances at himself in the reflection of the mirror for just a moment before he follows him in.

It's awkward, as the water hits the top of his head and the two of them try to readjust their positions.

"S'hot," George hisses. "Are you trying to boil me alive?"

Dream kisses him to shut him up. "Let me wash your hair."

His fingers work against his scalp in little circles, and the foam from the shampoo rolls down over his ears, shoulders, chest. Dream tilts his head back as he guides him back underneath the water, and it feels like drowning for just a moment. Dream manoeuvres him around, gently pulls him back out of the way from the water when he's done, and George feels like the fog has somehow made its way into his brain. He's dizzy and tired all at once.

"Tired," he wraps his arms around Dream's shoulders, standing on his tippy toes.

The ground is slippery, and he stumbles, luckily manages to balance himself.

Dream doesn't take too long on himself, and George would extend the offer to wash his hair too if his limbs didn't feel like they were made of jelly. He remembers the towel, and he remembers pulling on a fresh set of boxers, and he remembers climbing into bed next to Dream, a new sort of satisfaction sitting heavy in his chest.

"I'm happy with you," he whispers in the dark, tracing down the peaks and valleys carved into Dream's shoulders. "I'm really happy with you."

He goes to kiss Dream again, hard enough that the bed creaks and that the darkness around them spins.

"Happy with you too," Dream's hand engulfs his own.

And George is sure of it, perhaps now more than ever, that fate sent him here for him. Maybe the man that had beat him up in the woods was an angel, in disguise. Meant to catalyse a series of reactions that would make the two of them able to understand each other.

Dream would be angry, if George told him this, so he doesn't. And he tries not to think of fate, tries not to search for new gods to delude himself with just because he had forsaken the one from before.

George thinks of religion, of the cross on his bedside table and the girls spinning in their church dresses before their mothers pull them out of the aisles, and he thinks of the families climbing into their cars and driving into the distance. He falls asleep as they disappear further, further down the hills, until they become too small to see, until they become nothing at all.

There's a routine to the past three months; sunlight through the cracks of the blinds, hardwood cold beneath his feet. No feeling in his chest until midday. It's the moment of peace before he's forced to grit his teeth and bear the cross on his neck.

This is how things go wrong. George gets too comfortable, lets his guard down, gets lazy with the

details.

They awaken to a pounding on the door. “George? Dream?”

George sits up, and Dream pulls him back into bed.

“George,” the voice yells again. “George, open the door right now.”

Dream is awake all of a sudden, and they share a look of concern.

The end of the world comes all at once.

The lock turns and the door creaks open before George even has the opportunity to climb out of Dream’s bed. Sister Catherine walks in, still talking loudly, before she sees the two of them in the same bed, love bites littered across both of their chests, a bottle of lube on the bedside table, and he locks eyes with her.

He watches as Sister Catherine’s eyes widen in horror, and he racks his brain for an excuse, a reason, for something to say to get the two of them out of this, but he finds nothing.

She stands there staring at them, shocked, before George finally averts his gaze to the floor, stomach sinking down to his feet as the walls come crumbling in around him.

He contemplates getting out of bed, contemplates bed bugs, and fever and homesickness, but no excuse dares slip past his lips. He looks at Dream, who’s frozen in place, like not moving is going to save them.

Then, she steps backwards once, and then backwards again. “Please come meet with me downstairs in ten minutes.” Her hands are trembling, and George is fucked, he’s so fucked, he’s on the streets, thrown to the wolves after this for sure. “Don’t take a moment longer.”

Static crackles in his ears, and then suddenly everything is loud. The rustle of the covers and his breathing, the wind outside the window and the voices in his head, and George is doomed with every movement she takes away from them. White faced in horror, like she’d caught him killing someone.

Sister Catherine is in the doorway. Her hand is on the knob. Then, the door closes. Then, everything is quiet.

Chapter End Notes

i really love what i've read from deaf republic, so if ur looking for a collection of poems. my vouch is there. thank u for all the lovely comments on the last one, read them all appreciate u all . ty for reading and see u in the next one :)

retribution

Chapter Summary

I know if there were a hand
to hold throughout it all
it would have been bearable.
I would survive anything
for the promise of
a warm body
laying next to mine.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The terror sits fresh in his chest and his hands tremble, but George feels an eerie sense of calmness despite it all. He'd expected this to kill him. Perhaps he's resigned himself to this fate, knowing that it was coming the entire time. He'd expected guilt, expected himself to retreat back inside of his shell. A younger version of himself would already be on his knees in the chapel begging God to fix it as a last ditch attempt of salvation.

This is meant to be retribution, George thinks. It feels a lot more like freedom.

George wishes there was something going through his head. A solution, the words to pull the two of them out of this. Instead there is nothing. He looks over at Dream, who's staring at the ground with his jaw clenched, hands in fists.

"What's— what do we do?" Dream finally whispers out, turning his head to look at him.

George doesn't have a solution for him. "I don't know."

Dream inhales, exhales, closes his eyes and lies back. George can't even look at him, because it feels like this is all his fault. He bets that fate is laughing at him now, for hoping for a tragedy to set him straight for so long. The tragedy is here, and it's taken Dream as collateral.

Guilty, the voice in his head reminds him. *Everything you touch ends in ruin. You are guilty.*

Maybe George was right to wish for tragedy, because he thinks it while looking at Dream, and he can't let it end like this.

"We didn't do anything wrong," George reaches out to place a hand on Dream's shoulder, voice stronger than he feels. "We— we're going to get out of this."

Dream doesn't respond, just stays catatonic on top of the bedsheets. "Hm."

"I'm— I'm gonna go down and talk to her," George says it out loud before the courage can escape him, so that the fear letting Dream down will propel him into Sister Catherine's office and trump his fear of the punishment that'll follow. "You should— you can stay here."

Dream's eyes have closed again with resignation and defeat etched into his features, and George

feels rage and sadness and anger.

At the world, at this place and their wretched circumstances, at Sister Catherine who hadn't thought to know before entering their rooms. This was meant to be their place, and now everything good hee has been undone. It's no longer the place they fell in love, the place where Dream taught George courage, but the place where they got caught, the last place Dream had to himself outside of his home, despite how hellish it must have been. Everything gone.

Dream is still lying in bed. George walks over and puts on a jumper and jeans and his good pair of shoes. He contemplates wearing his cross but his fingers shake as he tries with the latch, and he doesn't think he can look Sister Catherine in the eye with it on, lest she curse him out for being a sinner.

His stomach lurches uncomfortably, but his heart aches at the same time. That's all he's ever going to get to be to this place; a sinner.

When he gets downstairs Sister Catherine is waiting for him at one of the tables, honey coloured hair brushed out of her eyes and fastened with a pearl clip.

Unfazed, unchanged, like what she is inevitably going to do isn't going to ruin George's world forever, break it beyond repair. She looks up at him as soon as he enters, and George wishes he could tell what she was thinking.

"George," she says, eyes flitting back to the sheet of paper in front of her. "Have a seat. The mass has been delayed for another half hour to account for you and Dream."

His face burns red in humiliation as he pulls out the chair in front of her, winces as it squeaks against the linoleum floor. She's silent for a little longer as she continues writing, the scritch of her pencil unnerving in the silence of the hall. George holds his breath, waits for her to be angry.

The pencil drops to the surface of the table, rolls forward. "Look at me, please George."

George's eyes snap to meet hers. He keeps his lips pressed into a thin line as she observes him. The acid in his stomach tries to crawl up his esophagus but he swallows it down, racks his brain for words to beg for forgiveness with.

Sister Catherine sighs. "I wish I hadn't seen that, if I'm being honest with you."

George says nothing, unfocuses his eyes and then refocuses them on the little scar on her chin.

"I've been looking all morning, for a bend in the handbook that would let me just—" she pauses, looks up as she contemplates what to say. "I didn't think it would— this is difficult for me."

He holds his breath, waits for her to say something devastating. There's a hand reaching over the table. He looks at her and she nods encouragingly, and George swallows down the nausea as he places his palm against hers.

"I don't— this isn't good, George," she finally sighs.

George expected as much. "I'm sorry."

She looks at him with her eyebrows raised. "Are you?"

George thinks about it. Not really. "I— yeah."

She sighs again, and George withdraws his hand, places it back in his own lap. They look at each other, and if George was a little smarter he'd cry and beg for forgiveness, or come up with an excuse about feeling ill, or something.

"Did— what was—"

"It's what you think it is," George sounds steadier than he feels. "So."

There's no point in lying to her, and he'd rather not out of fear of incriminating Dream.

"Are you sure?" she presses. "I— I want to help you George. Give me something to work with."

George wants to shrug, turns his head to the side and tell her some things can't be helped, that some people are beyond saving. Some people aren't scared of hellfire, because they don't think it's real, and some people condemn themselves to misery forever.

"You— the seminary," she starts, but George flinches and she stops talking. "I see."

Do you? He wants to ask her with his teeth bared. He looks at her, watches the space between her eyebrows crease as she frowns, like she's not quite sure what to make of him. It reminds him of his mother.

"If—" she pauses, thinking for a moment. "If you were ever in a position where your safety felt like it was being compromised—"

"No," the words come out sharp. "I was fine."

"Come on, George," she pleads like it hurts her. "I'm trying to help you."

She's a lunatic if she thinks George will throw Dream under the bus for a chance to fake salvation. What's the worst that's going to happen once all this is over? His report reads that he hasn't gotten better at all, and his parents toss him out of the house and he's forced to find some place to go. It's what's going to happen anyways. There's no point in trying to delay it any longer.

"I don't—" he pauses, and he almost feels bad for her. "I don't think I need you to. What's— are you going to put it on our records, or what?"

He holds her gaze despite the terror creeping into his lungs, threatening to send him into a state of panic.

She swallows. "Go back upstairs, I'll— I'll tell the priests you're both unwell, and that you've got to be excused from the mass. Get rid of anything that shouldn't be there, I don't care how you do it."

This was meant to be vengeance, meant to be his punishment for swinging back and forth between believing and unbelieving, for being so unsure and so guilty. Instead, Sister Catherine stares at him like she pities him, and George thinks that this is somehow worse. He stares at her in disbelief.

"Go," she points her chin towards the stairwell. "Tell— just. Don't."

"Why?" George asks, unable to bite back the question.

Sister Catherine grimaces. "I— You're leaving after this session, it won't matter very much at all, will it?"

George doesn't speak, waits for her to continue.

“Dream is— Dream will still be here,” she sighs, fingers dragging through the ends of her hair. “And you’ll be— you’re going to be at the seminary, and I think you’re going to do a lot of good there, George.”

George can’t look her in the eye anymore.

“And if I report you the way I’m supposed to, I— you’re not going to get to do that, and I think that— I would do a lot more harm than good. For the church. For you.”

George hasn’t thought about the church unprompted for ages. He wants her to keep talking, wants to understand, but she doesn’t have anything more she wants to say to him.

“Dream didn’t come,” she doesn’t sound surprised as she glances at the stairwell again.

George doesn’t respond.

“Get— get everything in your room straightened then, and don’t— don’t do anything like that for the rest of your time here. At least,” she sighs, pressing her forehead into her palms. “God.”

The disappointment almost makes him want to beg her to see him differently, but then he remembers that there’s no point. What’s there to see differently if she’s horrified by what he is? *Some people are beyond saving*, she must be thinking. He doesn’t want her to change her mind, scrambles up the stairs with reckless abandon. When he turns the knob to their bedroom, it’s locked.

“Dream,” George calls out. “I— It’s me. Open the door.”

There’s a few beats of silence, and then the door creaks open. Dream looks just as troubled as he did when George left him, hunched over and looking at him like he expects the worst. The door clicks shut.

“She’s not gonna tell,” George breathes out with a grin.

Dream doesn’t look relieved in the slightest.

“What’s wrong?” George frowns, but Dream shakes his head no, like he can’t bear it.

He stumbles backwards, sits on the side of George’s bed. George lowers himself to the ground before him, places a hand on either one of his cheeks. Dream looks at him; ashamed and tortured and brimming with an emotion George doesn’t know what to call.

“They know now,” his voice is quiet. “I can’t stay here.”

“It’s just Sister Catherine,” George tells him. “She said she’s not going to tell anyone.”

Dream looks frustrated, like there’s something he wants to say but he isn’t quite sure how to say it. George waits for him to process, waits for everything to fall in place. He hopes, selfishly, that this ends with the two of them walking out of here together.

They’re what’s best for each other. He knows this more than he knows anything. They can move away to wherever the cheapest train ticket will get them, their own little place. Do something for themselves, outside of where they’re meant to be stuck.

“I don’t want to be here anymore,” Dream closes his eyes, pressing his lips together. “And I— I don’t know where I’m meant to go.”

"You can come with me," George tells him, craning his neck up to kiss both of his cheeks. "Hey, please don't— please don't be sad. I—"

"I don't want you to leave me," Dream's voice cracks as he looks at George with intensity. "I don't want you to leave me more than I want you to go away. But I want you to be happy more than I want you to be here, so you should go, but—"

He inhales, and George watches him carefully, holding onto him tight incase he falls to pieces.

"I want to go with you more than anything, but that means I lose everything, and I don't know what to do," he closes his eyes, absolved. "I was fine before you, you know. I was okay with all this, but now you want better and it makes me want better too."

"Then come with me," George urges him. "We can go anywhere. We— I don't have any money, but we can figure it out. There's got to be something out there for us."

"I'm *scared*, George," Dream's chest heaves. "I've never— this is the most stable place I've ever had."

"*Before*," George insists. "Before me."

"We didn't even know each other three months ago, how can you even say that to me?" Dream's voice dies into a whisper. "We—"

"Dream," George feels the urgency. "We can leave here. It's not gonna be easy but it's better than whatever's keeping you here."

For the first time it feels like he's getting through to him. How long can a man love his cage before he starts to starve himself to become small enough to fit through the bars? How long had George spent singing with his eyes shut, convincing himself that he was free? How much longer can Dream do the same?

"I don't understand you all the time," George admits, looking up at him. "I don't understand how you can want so much for me but not for yourself."

"Because I love you," Dream says it like it's easy, and there's a lump in George's throat.

"I love you too," George presses his palms into the fat of his cheeks, bringing their foreheads together so they touch. "And I can't imagine leaving here without you. I'll be just as miserable."

"I—"

"I will," George affirms, dropping his hands down to clutch at Dream's desperately. "I swear to God, I'll regret it forever. And I think that maybe you'll regret it forever too."

"So what am I supposed to do? Just pack everything up to leave?" Dream whispers. "I— this is everything I have, George. This is the closest thing I have to a home."

"Sounds like an awful home," George tells him, anguish in his belly.

Dream thinks about this for a moment, and George feels guilty when he sees the dullness in his eyes, the way the life and the hope has been drained out of him. He remembers seeing it flood back in, slow like the sun in the mornings; the red in his cheeks and the creases in the corners of his eyes, unchapped lips despite the winter dragging on. He'd watched the slow decomposition back to the state at which he had found him, loved him all the way through, and George wants to love him

until he blossoms again.

“I can make you happy,” he says quietly, a plea. “Please let me make you happy.”

The moments stretch on for eternity, and then finally Dream looks at him, tilts his head to the side. “I have to tell you something.”

George’s heart skips a beat. “What?”

Dream nods, closes his eyes and inhales, before opening them again. “I have to tell you the whole story. Then you get to decide whether you want me to come with you or not.”

“The whole story,” George parrots, heart thudding around in his chest.

“It’s nothing— I just can’t,” Dream thinks for a moment. “I can’t let you take me with you when I’ve been avoiding telling you everything that’s landed me here. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” George runs his thumb over the grooves of Dream’s knuckles.

Dream shakes his head no. “You’re— you’re the first friend I’ve had in ages and I’m scared that if I say too much you’ll run away.”

It makes sense as to why Dream had been guarded from the beginning, determined not to let anyone get in the way of his plan to stay in the place that made him miserable until he aged out of this place.

“Is it— is it the reason you feel like you have to stay here?”

Dream nods grimly, glances to the side. “It’s— it’s stupid, really. I’m sure there are so many people that have come and gone that’re like me.”

“Like you,” George thinks about what this implies for a moment.

“I don’t mean like— like you and me,” he looks at George, leans in closer. “I mean that— I don’t know. I’m the only one that’s been left here for so long. It’s— I feel like they’re almost waiting to see how long I’ll bother to stay here before I finally get the guts to leave.”

“Who’s they?” George asks gently.

Dream looks down at his hands. “My parents.”

“Are you— are they still around?” George shifts his weight from his knees to his ankles.

Dream nods and shrugs at the same time. “It’s— I don’t know. I didn’t see them much growing up. They were always travelling and I was always over at my aunt’s house, grandma’s house. And then they found out the whole gay thing, and then I was here, and then they came and picked me up. Then they put me back, and they told me to just stay until I fixed myself.”

George presses his lips together, and doesn't say anything.

“I keep thinking,” Dream continues, frowning and smiling and shaking his head. “That one day they’ll come back for me and bring me home, but they haven’t.”

His heart clenches in his chest as he watches Dream shake his head again, jut out his jaw to keep it from trembling.

"I can leave," he finally says. "But there's this stupid part of me that wants them to come get me. I wanna go home and be a kid again," his voice cracks at the end. "But they're not coming."

Suddenly it makes sense; why Dream was so determined to stay despite this place tearing him apart. George can't help but feel bad for him, but the words to comfort him can't seem to find their way out of his throat.

"It's okay," Dream says. "It's— I don't think they're coming back."

"I'm sorry," George says quietly, moving to sit next to him on the bed. "I— I don't know what you're planning on doing, but if you're leaving you can leave with me. If you'd like."

Dream sighs, the sound heavy, and George feels real guilt settle into him once again. "All of this is so hard."

George crosses his arms over his chest. "It's— it's not easy."

They look at each other, share a bittersweet smile.

"If you could go anywhere," George starts, and he's sure that Dream is sick of his hypotheticals by now, "where would you go?"

Dream considers his question for a moment. George expects him to say home, some place familiar.

"I don't know," he admits instead. "I spent a lot of time thinking about everything in here that I think I've forgotten there's a lot out there, past the trees."

Anywhere, George thinks desperately. I'll take you anywhere outside of here.

Dream breaks the silence. "George?"

George turns his head to look at him. They're more alike than they think they are. The world is unkind to them. George hides inside of himself to protect what's left of him after the vultures have their pickings. Dream grows thick skin and bares his teeth. George hides from the rain in a burning house. Dream keeps his head above water however he can. It's all survival, more or less.

Dream turns to look at him, swallowed skin under his eyes against the afternoon light. Later, he thinks he's going to remember this moment forever.

"George," Dream swallows hard and looks to the side, before meeting his eyes. "I think I'm going to leave with you too."

The relief is slow, blossoms in his stomach before it spreads to his chest, arms, everywhere. He pulls Dream close, smiles into the skin of his neck, and suffering is worth it, always worth it if it ends like this.

"Really?" he asks, even though he doesn't think he has to.

Dream expels a soft noise from his throat; a tremor of fog in the cold winter air, and it's salvation, finally salvation. "Yeah."

They're battered and doomed but at least they're doomed together. George thinks back to the flower beds outside the front of Jericho, how lovely they'll look despite holding no life for the last time. Everything gets to be beautiful when it's the last time.

It's horrifying. He thinks of the worst that could happen to them, and then pushes the thought

away. He kisses Dream on the nose, laughs and sobs at once. His heart beats in his chest. It's not beautiful, because it's not the last time.

Chapter End Notes

hii. sorry for the wait between chapters life has just been hectic. you're all lovely <3 ty for your comments see u in the next one

revelations

Chapter Summary

I want to meet you in every place I have ever loved.
Listen to me— I am your echo.
I would rather break the world than lose you.
— Amal El-Mohtar, *This Is How You Lose the Time War*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sister Catherine knocks on their door a few hours later, tells George that he's to sleep in the spare bedroom on the second floor for the last night. Her eyes dart between him and Dream, before she swallows hard and opens her mouth as if she wants to say something. George watches her bottom lip quiver, like she's unsure of the words. Then her lips press together, and she offers him a half-hearted smile, something between pity and encouragement, before disappearing back down the stairs.

George isn't sure what to make of it.

"We don't get to spend our last night here together," Dream notes in a whisper, sounding disappointed.

George can't bring it in himself to be disappointed. "S'okay. Doesn't matter to me."

"Would've been nice," Dream looks out the window, doesn't meet his eyes.

Dream is silent, staring at the space between the floorboards.

"I get to have you for as long as you'll let me once we leave," George crosses his arms over his chest, trying to feel some of the certainty of his words. "I don't need a last night here."

Dream's foot taps nervously against the hardwood. "Hm."

George wonders if he's being insensitive. Dream turns to look at him as he bites the nail of his thumb.

"There's no more last night together," Dream inhales, and then frowns, and then the tension between his eyebrows dissolves, just like that. "I just realised."

"There isn't," George presses his warm palms against the cool tips of his fingers.

Dream smiles, soft, like the wind after the first snowfall. "There's just forever, then. If you're having me for as long as I'm letting you."

He feels like his heart is catching fire; slow heat, and then he's burning up, enveloped in red, enveloped in something with an intensity past what his body can take. Then Dream's smile fades, and his expression morphs into something more contemplative, more serious.

They've been doing that today. Floating between content and worried. He wonders if what the world has in store for them is worse than what's within these walls. Then he remembers Dream and his sunken eyes and standoffish demeanour, the lines along his forehead and his chapped lips, like life was being drained from him slowly. There's more for the both of them out there. This can't be the only way for them to survive. It can't be.

He wishes the relief of Dream coming with him would last just a little longer, but it's swallowed by the terror instead. It's a hasty decision. They're escaping by the skin of their teeth. He looks around at the dim lit room for what feels like the last time, his few belongings tucked neatly into his backpack.

"Where are we going tomorrow, then?" Dream sits on the floor, presses the heel of his palm against the edge of the loose floorboard. It creaks before lifting and sliding out of the way, unveiling the stacks of paper underneath. "When they let everyone leave?"

"Bus station," George watches him pick each individual slip of paper out, stack them neatly on top of each other. "We'll just keep going until the end of the line, I guess."

"And then?"

"I don't know."

"What about your parents?" Dream shifts onto his knees, pulls three yellowing pages from the hole in the floor, places them in a separate pile.

He's silent for a long while. He's made his peace with it in his head—made his peace with the death of most of his old life.

"Sister Catherine said that they're planning to reach here some time in the evening," the nerves tighten in his stomach. "We'll be gone by the morning."

Dream hesitates. "Don't you want to say goodbye?"

"It doesn't matter if I want to say goodbye," George fights back the bitter lugh clawing up his throat. "They'll see what I've chosen, and they—I won't be talked into being miserable again. I can't."

"Do you think you could be talked into staying?" Dream watches him, carefully, and George can't help but feel like he's being tested, like Dream's questions are trying to peel back the layers to reveal something specific.

"I think if I see them I'll start wanting to be their son," he watches as the pages sort themselves into files, watches the way Dream stares at the words before deciding which pile each sheet of paper belongs in. "And being their son makes me miserable."

"But you still want to be their son."

George thinks about this for a moment. "Yes."

To his surprise, Dream nods slowly. "I understand."

George doesn't want to push too far, doesn't know if asking Dream more about his family is crossing a line, so he doesn't ask. Dream will tell him when he wants to tell him, and George will listen.

“I don’t feel as weird about leaving as I thought I would,” Dream admits. “I thought I’d feel more scared than I do.”

“That’s one of us,” George laughs, but Dream places a hand on his knee, looks at him with a gentleness that’s reserved for him, belongs to only George.

“I don’t think anything bad is going to happen,” Dream presses his mouth to George’s knee, a gesture of affection that sends electricity through all of the rest of him. “I’m with you, and I think we’re going to be okay. And you’re with me, and I won’t let you be not okay.”

George appreciates his faith more than anything. His whole life he’s been waiting for someone to have faith in him like this. Blind, loving, hopeful.

“You need to trust yourself, George,” Dream’s hand is on the back of his neck and pulling him closer so that he can kiss him on the mouth.

There’s empty space in his chest when their lips press together, and George realises that it’s because the guilt is gone. More space for something else. When they pull apart and Dream watches him with stars in the corners of his eyes, with reverence and adoration, like George is someone worth believing in, he sees a hazy idea of a future in his peripheral vision. One where he and Dream are together, one where he and Dream are happy. Dream’s hands grip his own. For the first time in ages, he thinks he can see a place where he belongs.

George turns his head to the side when he wakes the next morning. There’s a hollow feeling in his chest when he’s met with drywall instead of Dream sleeping across from him. There’s a revelation born in his chest. He’s in love with Dream, but it’s nothing like before.

Before felt like desperation. Like the two of them were clinging to each other as the flood took the rest of the world, like everything was underwater and they were the only ones that knew how to swim. There was tragedy, and they happened to fall in love. Now, it feels different.

When they walk out of here, into the rest of the world, looking for better, there’s one thing George wants to keep more than anything, and it’s not survival anymore, but fondness. It’s new life.

He can hear the people in the rooms next to him talking loudly and knocking things over. He cringes, grateful for his placement in the attic. He’s unsure if he would’ve been able to handle these shoebox rooms, alone in the quiet hours of the night.

There’s a knock on the door.

“Come in,” George calls out, clearing his throat.

Sister Catherine peaks through the crack of the door, before opening it up completely. “Good morning.”

“Good morning.” George stares at her forehead instead of in her eyes.

“If you want to go upstairs and just— take a last look around, make sure you haven’t forgotten anything anywhere,” she gestures towards the attic, professional as always.

George thanks her. Then she leaves.

When he gets back upstairs and sees Dream, he launches himself in his arms despite himself.

“Hi,” Dream laughs into the crook of his neck. “Did you miss me?”

“Yes,” George breathes him in.

He pulls back to see that Dream is wearing new clothes, ones he’s never seen him in before. There’s an envelope placed on his bed, next to his backpack.

“Sister Catherine came up to talk to me earlier,” his hands slither to either side of George’s waist.

George feels his eyes narrow. “What did she say?”

Dream shrugs. “She just talked to me for a little while about why I was leaving. And I figured there’s no point in lying, because we’re not gonna see her ever again, and I told her about you. How you make me better.” His thumbs trace George’s hip bones in two neat circles. “And she told me that— I think she feels bad for us, because I told her we don’t really have a plan, I didn’t tell her about the bus, but I told her that we’re just like, on our own. And she told me that since I’m leaving and the payment for the next session has already been processed, and that I’m over eighteen, I’m eligible to claim a partial refund.”

George looks at him, waits for him to elaborate.

“She said they sent out a letter to my parents two weeks ago, and they haven’t confirmed that the money is still only for the program, so legally, I can take it,” he gestures towards the envelope. “I think we can— she told me that there’s a bus station two miles north of town, and there’s buses to Idaho, Denver, Nevada for cheap. Said that the two of us should take a look, and that places there aren’t too expensive to rent close to the city.”

George’s heart leaps in his chest. Dream hands him the envelope.

“Why?” he asks quietly, can’t help but feel the creeping suspicion that there’s a catch to this.

“I don’t know,” Dream sounds a little dazed, like all of this has just become very real to him. “She — maybe she feels bad for us.”

“Is it legal for you to take the money? What if— what—”

“She showed me the paperwork,” Dream soothes him, hands him ten pages stapled together. “If I don’t want the money she said I can give it back to her downstairs, but George, we really do need the money.”

“What if—”

“I think she’s trying to help us,” Dream’s hand cups his cheek, and he’s pressing his lips against the tip of George’s nose. “And I think that— I think we should take it. My parents sure as hell aren’t going to come after me.”

He can’t help but feel a little bad. “I’m sorry.”

Dream shakes his head no. “Don’t be. It’s— well. It’s something that’s just going to take me a while to come to terms with, but I’d rather come to terms with it than keep waiting. I think the waiting is killing me.”

George presses his cheek to his chest, unsure of how else to comfort him. Dream melts against

him, and he marvels in the way their bodies have learnt each other, marvels in the way that they've learnt each other. He thinks of the floorboards, thinks of how they used to be cruel, but it doesn't ache anymore. All he can think about is how they've grown together despite being planted to keep each other in place, and he thinks that there is hope, more of it than he ever realised. He clutches the envelope tighter. He thinks there is something out there, greater than the two of them, that's been looking out for him after all.

When they leave, clutching the straps of their backpack, Sister Catherine slips them a piece of paper with ten digits scrawled across it.

"If you ever need it," there's a sense of urgency in her voice. "And— it's not the church's number. It's mine."

"I'm sorry," George blurts out before he can stop himself.

After all she had done to help him, he'd revealed himself as nothing like she'd expected.

"Don't be," she offers him a stiff lipped smile, still a little unnatural, like she doesn't quite understand him, but there's no malice in her eyes, only uncertainty. "I just— I can't send you two out there with nothing. It's not right."

Right. Was locking Dream away here instead of raising him right? Was treating George like a criminal for who he loved right? He supposes none of that was up to her. Yet here they are. Maybe Sister Catherine isn't sure what to make of him. Maybe George isn't sure what to make of her either.

"Thank you," he says.

When they leave, he expects there to be something bittersweet about it. Then he thinks of what's ahead, and he thinks of what's happened, and he finds nothing to be happy about at all. They walk down the road, crossing when the signal turns green. George sighs. That's the end of it.

The next bus to far away from here leaves at nine o'clock in the night time.

It's actually to Nevada.

"We have to get ID once we get there," George tells him. "I don't know how to do that."

"We'll figure it out," Dream tries to soothe him.

"If I call my parents and tell them to give it all to me— my social security number, my passport—"

"We don't need it right now," Dream reminds him. "The guy at the ticket booth said they never check."

"What if today's the day they start?"

Dream looks around the empty station, and then leans forward to kiss right between his eyebrows. "Everything is going to work itself out."

George tries to distract himself by looking through the magazines, and his heart aches at the reminder that the only company Dream had for ages were scraps of paper tucked underneath the

floorboards. “Do you know what I want most for us?”

Dream thinks for a moment, and then shakes his head no.

“I want everything with you,” George is suddenly embarrassed, feels boyish and small and like this confession is perhaps the most intimate one he’s ever given. “I want to— I want a house with a painter’s studio, and a stupid big field out back for the dogs to run around in.”

“Dogs,” Dream hums, contemplates this for a moment. “What if I like cats?”

“Why can’t we have both?”

Dream shrugs. “Good point.”

George shrugs, mimics him with a grin. They dissolve into a fit of giggles, and it’s easy like this, easy without the weight of eternal hellfire, without waiting for something that’s never going to happen. They’re lighter out here, lighter than they’ve ever been in there.

“I want to build you a library,” George confesses, taking Dream’s hands into his own. “I want— everything you want, I want for you, but I want it to be grand. I want to blow your mind.”

“You blow my mind just fine right now,” Dream squeezes his palms with his big hands but he grins, and George loves him, loves the fat of his cheeks and the lines on his forehead and the way the sunlight casts across his skin.

I love you, George says to him with his eyes. *I love you I love you I love you*.

I love you, the flutter of Dream’s lashes say back. *I love you*, go the red of his cheeks, the crows feet of his eyes.

Dream and him spend the morning in the gift shop tucked into the corner, with only half of its neon sign lit and sludge down the two narrow aisles. Dream takes off his cross before they leave, but hesitates when he looks at the trash bin, instead places it on a shelf. George keeps his on.

“Do you want a keepsake?” Dream asks him, holding up a plush bear wearing a T-shirt that says Utah across the front in collegiate letters.

George snorts. “No.”

They buy chips from the concession stand for lunch, and they sit cross legged in the waiting stands, grin at each other like madmen. There’s adrenaline coursing through him, or maybe it’s hope, or maybe it’s love, or maybe it’s the world calling out to him with open arms, welcoming him home.

They board the bus at eight fifty two, sit three seats from the very back. The driver informs them that the heater is broken, and advises them to keep on their coats for the duration of the ride. There are complaints from some of the passengers at the front, but the two of them take it as an excuse to sit closer together.

It’s dark now. He realises that he hasn’t thought about the world ending all day. He’s sure he will, tomorrow morning, when they look for a place to stay. But right now the walls hold steady, and the evening air is cold and it rouges their cheeks, and he thinks that everything will maybe turn out right for him. For Dream.

The engine hums, and the driver reminds them that they’re headed to Carlin, Nevada. This is the

end of the worst of it. This is the beginning of the rest of their lives. Dream's thigh brushes against his. George's heart squeezes in his chest. Together.

George looks out the window at the back of the bus, watches the station, and the rest of this town becomes nothing more than a blip on the horizon. Dream squeezes his hand, presses his cheek to his shoulder, and he knows that the two of them are going to be okay.

"Ready?" Dream asks in his ear, even though he supposes there isn't much choice in the matter anymore.

There's always a choice in the matter, George thinks to himself. He could pry open the window and jump onto the road. But he's done self destructing in an attempt to avoid what he's afraid of. He needs to be kind to himself. Not only for him, but for Dream. The uneven pavement of the winding road sends them jolting forward, and then backwards. George clings to Dream's arm.

The street lights blur behind them. Dream puts his head on George's shoulder as they head out into the unknown.

Chapter End Notes

hiii. this is the end

if you noticed the chapter count went down by one, it's because i've decided to post the last "chapter" (the epilogue) as a separate one shot (which will be in the series this fic is in that u can check in with/bookmark/sub to if you are interested :) i started the epilogue and it's ending up longer than the usual chapters so I'd rather post it as a stand alone).

thank u very much for reading. i am trying to keep the authors note short so i don't act cringe but it means so much that u all stuck around. this is the piece of writing that has taken me the longest to finish

thank you for believing in my characters (for loving them, for cheering them on, for picking them apart) and thank you for letting me to tell this story.

thank u times a million for all the wonderfully kind comments - it means so much to me that people take the time to tell me what they think of my writing, even how it's impacted them — that is so much more than i ever thought was possible.

also thank u to darcy urplace this is for u. ik i have driven u insane talking about this fic. u have been such a support (im putting you in my pocket). care about you very much thanks for dealing with my crazy

i am working on other things outside of l'appel du vide and the sequel so obligatory feel free 2 browse my ao3 profile i write a little all over the place in terms of genre but fuck it we ball. hope to see u around in the comments some other time or in the sequel (i will do my best to reply to every comment on this chapter <3)

okay bye kiss kiss. Love u all hope to see u around

- angelbeachcat

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EDIT (2022/10/13): one shot sequel is posted :)

End Notes

let me know your thoughts so far in exchange i will mail u a slice of pie
[fic playlist](#)

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Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!